BLACK SOIL

JOSEPHINE DONOVAN

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BLACK SOIL

CHAPTER I

DIRECTION? . . . There was no direction. The prairie stretched to the end of the world. Nell Connor, seated on a high wagon, swayed with the motion of the ox team and closed her eyes. Would there be, perhaps, some change in this scene when she looked again? No. No change. She became insensible to the prattle of Tim and the children, and listened to Dutch Fred as he directed his oxen. "Gee-e. Haw! Haw! Ha-!" On, on toward an elusive horizon. Did that driver with the long, bushy beard and kind gray eyes really *know* of a destination? Where was he taking the Connor family? Why had Tim selected land so far, far from any signs of life? It was hours, days, since the railroad terminal—the last connection with civilization—had been swallowed in those palpitating grasses.

"Look, childer," Tim was calling to Danny and Margaret from where he stood behind the wagon seat. "See the wild turkeys!"

Flocks of big fowl keeping off at a distance, their long necks and topknots resembling flowers.

The wind blew fitfully against the slow-moving wagon. It whistled mournfully around Connors' household furniture, jerked Nell's lavender poke bonnet, billowed her full skirt. She wound her skirts more securely around her ankles, tied her bonnet tightly and held her head down.

Margaret, toddling about, found her way under the seat and pulled at Nell's skirt. The child raised a travel-stained face. "Let's doe home, Mom. Let's doe home."

For answer Nell raised the child to her lap.

Home! Home on a shady New England street must be a memory now. Somewhere here among these grasses would be home. Where? . . . Her eyes could not measure the expanse of land. A loneliness seized her. The fear that had haunted her on the train, as every revolution of the wheels carried them farther west, took possession of her again and made determination give way to bodily fatigue. Besides, wagon seats are not built for comfort.

Margaret, from her place of vantage on Nell's lap, was surveying the country. "Oh!" she cried, her cheeks pink, her blue eyes flashing. "Fowers! Fowers! Everyfing is fowers!"

Nell looked from the child's glorified face to the prairie. Stretches apparently all blue and patches of pink beckoned to them. They were making a road through flowers—tramping them down—rolling over them—going along and crushing down more. It *was* a world of flowers!

"See, a good house?" Dutch Fred pointed with his goad at an unpainted frame house squatted down on the grass. Surrounding it were sheds thatched with dry brown hay. They passed no other habitations except occasional sod houses, like clods of black earth, which gave no signs of life. Yet stovepipes, sticking through the grassy roofs, proved that there the business of living was carried on.

When the oxen stamped into a deep slough and the wagon lunged in after them, Nell grew rigid. Clinging

to the seat and holding the baby tightly, she peeped over the side of the wagon box and saw only a bed of clear water over which tall grasses were blowing and nodding in the wind. When the dripping wagon was drawn safely to dry grass, the staunch, dependable power of the oxen convinced her. As they slashed through other sloughs, she sat as serenely as the wild ducks that nested on top of the muskrat houses which looked like conical piles of drift in the water. With Tim and the children she marveled at the countless number of yellow-headed blackbirds that circled above them, and admired the dove coloring of the silent, humped-up blue heron stationed on the water's edge.

"Your land come soon now," Dutch Fred announced, as he surreptitiously spat tobacco juice against the wagon wheel.

At this Nell's tall husband stood erect and searched the landscape. Nell, too, watched the horizon.

Land coming! Where?

She wearied of the futile search. The sheen of sun and grass hurt her eyes. Why did the wagon not advance toward the land? She looked at the driver—he was silent, listless. Margaret, asleep, rested a heavy head on her arm. The oxen swayed; the rims of the wagon wheels shone as they glided sinuously through the grass.

"There it is!" Tim shouted.

In the midst of the green ahead there was a white speck like the sail of a boat far out at sea. It drew nearer . . . larger. It was a house. Dutch Fred soon stopped the oxen and climbed from the wagon. The chain jingled as it loosened around the tongue and the oxen reached for mouthfuls of grass. After walking

around a rod or so, he came to a piece of wood stuck in the ground.

"Here your land is!"

Boyishly Tim leaned over the seat, put his hands on Nell's shoulders and made oration: "This is the finest one hundred and sixty in the West and cost just five dollars an acre." Then half to himself, "I hope, please God, we'll never regret the move."

"I know we shan't," Nell assured him. She cried then and could say no more. Their own fields, her husband's emotion and her aching back all added to her feeling.

Dutch Fred peered into her face with beaming eyes. "You must not cry, your man get strong, you get rich."

Nell could not answer, but she laid her hand on his calloused palm.

"Nobody lives near us, Pop," Danny said petulantly. "Who'll play with me?"

"Don't worry about that, me bye," Tim answered pleasantly. "We'll hunt out the fairies. There must be hundreds of 'em hidden under these flowers."

"You got a cellar," Dutch Fred announced. The pile of black earth near the building indicated this. In comparison, the boards of the house were chalky white. Where was the roof? There were only two sides boarded.

"Mine Gott! It is not ready! It is not done!" Wild eyed, Dutch Fred looked at the silent family. "We won't unload," he said, shaking his head. "You come with me to mine soddy. It is not big, but you can come."

As Nell stood in the unfinished house, a square patch of blue sky formed a roof. She untied the lavender poke bonnet. "Let's stay here, Tim!"

Tim nodded.

"It's good the carpenter made you a well already." Dutch Fred led the way to a hole in the ground about three feet deep. "You think you stay? Then I unload, and come back in the morning."

Tim drew out a round wallet. "I want to pay you now for the trip from the railroad."

Dutch Fred smiled, but as he began to speak his voice quivered and his eyes watered. He grasped Tim's wrist with both of his hands. "No, no money, Teem. I am glad you come once. We need one like you. I go now."

"How far?" Nell asked.

"Seven mile. I am your nearest neighbor."

As the smiling settler started off east, Nell wanted to run after him and call out, "Take us back! Take us back!" The oxen moved on. . . .

Tim dipped up a drink for the children. "Fine tastin' water," he commented. Nell stood beside the packing boxes, her hand on her mother's sewing machine. She looked to the east—sky and grass; to the west—grass and sky.

CHAPTER II

THE prairie was creeping out from under a fog. Sinuously it moved. Having freed its head, it extended a long neck, raised Herculean shoulders, then lay motionless. Released fog slowly, reluctantly lifted and revealed a portion of the prairie's flat back. Dawn, a phantom trailing a web of pearly light, sifted in, peered about, and disclosed—a shanty. On the doorstep of the shanty stood Nell Connor with her face raised to welcome the day.

The daylight played about her. It touched the jagged fringe on her gray shawl; it toyed with the sheen in her braid of brown hair; it glistened on the blisters of her face and hands.

"It's light," she said aloud. "It's light, thank God." Turning in the direction of the county seat, she peered into the receding fog from which her husband and the ox team must surely emerge soon.

Nell Connor had on many occasions during the past two years anxiously awaited Tim's safe return. Today, however, she had no fear of fog. She was filled with anxiety for the success of his trip. *Would the bank loan him more money?* Money to compensate for the loss of their wheat by fire a few days before, a loan with which to pay interest on the mortgage and buy flour for the winter.

Winter.

Nell looked toward the northeast, but the receding fog revealed only prairie; prairie whose general appear-

ance had not changed since Dutch Fred had deposited the Connor family and their packing boxes beside two boarded walls.

That incomplete shanty, however, had evolved into a tight, comfortable home, luxuriating in two rooms and a loft. A third child, Kitty Ann, had joined the forces of young Danny and Margaret in their world of flowers, and was already able to carry fistfuls of bloom to her admiring mother. The Connors had a start in stock, a few chickens, a quarter section of land, a healthy mortgage—and two crop failures.

"Not so much a failure of crops as a failure to harvest the crops," Tim Connor had expressed it. The first year, having arrived too late to do much breaking, they sowed sod corn and oats. It was a dry season, but the belated crop flourished miraculously. Near harvest time, however, it was laid flat by a wind; and then, lest it dare raise its head again, an ensuing hailstorm had fairly beaten it into the ground.

This, the second crop, had been wheat. Escaping previous catastrophes, it had greened, ripened, was harvested, and in its setting of four golden cones had assumed the dignity of monuments—monuments to toil, to patience and to the goodness of God. Then had come the fire, Tim away with the threshing crew.

The scene returned to Nell in the morning light as the stretch of charred stubble and the pile of black straw came into view. She saw in retrospect flames reaching to the smoking sky, striking out at her as she lashed them with wet gunny sacks. The red tongues winding venomously around the setting of wheat. The locking of the terrorized children in the house. The starting of the

backfires that saved them and the buildings.

"What harm about the wheat? Let the wheat go! Ye're safe, thank God," had been Tim's mollifying comment when he and the other threshers had arrived. "There's always wheat," he had repeated as he looked at his sleeping children as if he counted them, and tenderly applied badger oil to Nell's blistered face and hands.

As Nell reviewed this recent terrible experience in this wild land, she felt a greater appreciation of Tim's kindly qualities. With this realization came the resolve not to write East for help if he did not receive the necessary loan from the bank. Never again would her kinsmen have occasion to attribute their lack of success to Tim's shiftlessness. They would not learn of this defeat. She would not write. She was tired of their I-told-you-so letters, recalling advice given and comments made at the time of her departure.

"Tim Connor, that light-hearted devil-may-care, carrying off his young family to the wild West on a high adventure."

"He a farmer?"

There had been many jokes afloat, too.

"Say, did you hear about Tim Connor going to a lawless country to practice law? What're you going to live on, Tim?"

Tim, as usual, had taken it good naturedly. "I intend to charm the buffalo with me flute, and lead the Indian choir on Sundays and holy days."

Friends had tried to dissuade him, but he had answered doggedly: "I'm going out West."

In those days, only Nell had sympathized with Tim

in his ambition. She told him that she was willing to go to the end of the earth with him despite the persuasions of her aunt and uncle.

They had come to the end of the earth indeed. And the ill-luck which had accompanied them had been attributed to Tim's mismanagement. "Well," Nell reasoned bitterly, "a close-fisted plodder like Uncle Henry himself couldn't get on if God was against him."

Why, that was blasphemy!

Oh, she didn't mean that. No. God was good! God was good! They must wait . . . But, what if Tim didn't get the money? What then?

Well, God is good! And as she tried to dwell on the goodness of God, Tim's saying returned glibly to her, "God is good. It's a free country. . . . If you haven't shoes, you can go barefoot."

Nell jerked her shawl about her. She repulsed that sickening feeling of despair. She must fight against such thoughts. Was she going to lose her soul, too, in this godforsaken country? Were her children to be as heathen as the Indians, with such a mother?

If Tim would only come soon. He must surely come soon with good news.

Nell Connor pulled her nightgown down over her bare feet, and sat down on the cold step. Toward the east the familiar unchanged landscape opened up. Though looking at it, she thought only of their present needs. What was ever to become of the children? Bowing her head she prayed that the banker would loan Tim the money for the interest—and perhaps a little extra for flour.

Vaguely she heard the awakening prairie: high, pierc-

ing slough-sounds answering the warbles of the grass. A newly active breeze pricked into motion the prairie which unrolled before her to the end of her vision, assuming now its elusive contrasts: here a flash of bluish-green, there an irridescent silver—and on all sides shifting, mysterious shadows. Mystery! What misery in its keeping?

She shut her eyes away from it and rested her forehead on her knees. On her little step she felt as completely forsaken and at the mercy of the billowy prairie as if she were on a raft in mid-ocean. She allowed her thoughts to waver with the motion of the grass, and she was lulled into a lethargy not knowing whether fear or hope or assurance or premonition engrossed her.

When she raised her head the sun had risen. Shielding her eyes from the dazzle of the reeking grass, she scanned the horizon.

Was that Tim in the distance? No. That was a covered wagon. She could see its gray canvas swaying like a sail. "Company! Someone coming!" she said aloud. Enlivened by the luxury of seeing someone, her abstractions for the moment forgotten: "Wonder what kind they'll be. Perhaps they'll be from back East. At any rate they'll stop."

Hastening to the mirror of the walnut dresser, she wiped the oil from her face and hands and attempted to smooth her tawny, singed hair with a wet comb. Back and forth from door to bedroom she walked, watching, speculating. She put on her good dress, a gray alpaca basque and skirt: the tight sleeves crushed her blistered arms, but she did not flinch. "Tim can help them select their land. Wonder if they have any cattle!"

At the doorway she suddenly paused, baffled for the moment. Instead of the wagon gliding on with a slow regular beat, its horses were galloping. Horses galloping on a mover wagon!

"Oh, it's a new life coming," she concluded. "They're hastening to a woman's care."

She tied on an apron, brought in an armful of twisted slough grass, started the fire, and placed the copper-bottomed teakettle to boil, mentally taking stock of what she had on hand for such an emergency. She removed her baby from the big bed, got in readiness fresh linens, and from a cupboard unearthed a bottle containing a little olive oil. Stepping about swiftly, she was filled with a great exultation: she felt akin to the Dispenser of life; she was its custodian.

The covered wagon, with axles rattling, halted at her door. The ill-matched skeletons of horses were puffing and lathered, their dilated nostrils round as their wild eyes, which rolled involuntarily. Nell drew back in horror of the driver, who sat hunched like a ground squirrel —sleek and striped and cunning and gray.

"She's gone," he piped out, sniffling. "My wife Mary's dead. She had a wasting sickness. 'Tis my punishment for the drink." Clinging to the spokes of the wheel he climbed down and approached Nell. "She wanted to get to a settler's to die; but we're too late. Mules would've brung us." He shuffled toward the doorstep.

Nell was aroused from her stupefication by a little girl who had risen from under the seat and was also climbing down over the wheel. She had a profusion of

red matted curls which hung unrestrainedly about her face. At intervals the uncontrolled sobs which follow prolonged crying shook her thin body. On reaching the ground, she lowered her head to her soiled plaid dress on which she wiped her nose.

Nell's first impulse was to go to the rear of the wagon. "I'll wait till Tim comes," she decided and gave her attention to the girl.

With the intuition of a child, the girl knew that Nell was to be trusted. She raised her round, dark eyes to her and said between sobs. "He says he'll leave me to the wolves on the prairie."

"Isn't he your father?" Nell questioned.

The girl shook her head. "Not my ma there, neither. 'Dopted."

"I'll get you some breakfast," Nell said irrelevantly, "and then you can play with my children."

Mumbling, the man went off and lay down on the ground.

A series of questions revealed that the child knew nothing of her true parentage. The dead woman whom she called "ma" had cared for her; but "pa" had not. Ma had wished to reach a settler's home before her death so that she could leave the child there. They had kept driving as she directed, but the fog had got them.

Nell hardly knew what to make of the state of affairs. Her anticipated visit from the movers had revealed only more tragedy. As usual, she was helpless to allay it. Only tragedy and grief this country offered. And there was only Tim, goodhearted and impractical, upon whom to depend.

When Tim Connor drove up in the low wagon, his height and leanness were accentuated. His wife watched him from the kitchen window, studying his face for news. He eyed the covered wagon with the team tied to the plow interestedly, turned his oxen loose, and stood before his wife in the doorway.

"Company, I see," he shouted. He was smiling, but his eyes avoided Nell's. "My, but you're a fine stump of a girl," he addressed the strange child, touching her head lightly with his hat. "What's your name?"

"Shaylah," she answered timidly, "Shaylah Winnie Moore."

"So it's Sheila it is! Sheila Moore, a good name. Where's the rest of ye, and where are ye bound for?"

Sheila looked up into his face. She saw a tall man with bushy brown beard, a long, sharp nose, and eyes the color of the sky under which she had traveled for many days. He was smiling at her; his voice was gentle.

"Black Hills," she said, looking to Nell for help.

So Nell told Tim about the work that lay before them: they must bury a woman, sober up a man and make him realize the responsibility of a child. The neighbors, distant at all times, were now farther away, threshing. There were only the Connors.

Tim rubbed his hands together, lingering near the stove where the hay was snapping. His teeth chattered. "That fog was a cold one last night," he said, avoiding the immediate issue. "I got over too far west. Wasn't far from home."

Nell laid a hand on his shoulder. "That old ague acting up again? Everything all right?"

Tim nodded. "You bet yuh."

But Nell knew. He hadn't got the money! He hadn't got it! Her pulse hammered in her temples: He hadn't got it! Aloud she said: "Come and have a swallow of hot coffee."

After a hurriedly eaten breakfast, Tim tried to arouse the stranger but failed. "We might as well let him sleep it off," he said as he searched out material for a coffin.

Tim's carpentry was rough, but his efficiency was not to be questioned. He ripped some of the clean boards from a partition in the unused granary and fashioned a rude box.

Nell went to a black chest in the bedroom, drew out a satin-pieced quilt, and crushed it for a moment in her arms. "Here, Tim," she said, "line it with this."

Tim nodded without looking up.

On the slight rise of land in the free range to the south of Connor's homestead, land agent maps showed a square marked "Cemetery." Tradition claimed that a baby, whose parents afterward had returned to the East, had once been buried there. There was no evidence of a former grave, however, on this sunny swell of land when Tim Connor turned over the tufted grass whose roots were matted deep into the ground. The excavation, black and unfamiliar, piqued the curiosity of the wild things about. Coyotes stealthily crept near; a prairie chicken advanced boldly and peered into the darkness of the cavern; a buzzard circled about and disappeared at the horizon, only to return, circling, circling.

While Mr. Moore apparently lay in a drunken stupor, his wife Mary's funeral took place. The cortége, led by

Connor's unperturbed oxen, rolled past the squatty house with its thin coil of white smoke forcing itself vertically into a cloudless sky; past the small granary, blatant with its shingled roof; past the shed, hay-thatched and plastered with the nests of mud-swallows; past the struggling cottonwood grove; past the slough well with its square wooden pump; out upon the shining prairie, quiescent and guileless as if it knew not death, the while buffalo skulls and branching antlers lay hidden in its grasses.

When the wagon stopped beside the dark mound, Nell sent the children away. "Run off," she said, "and pick all the flowers you can carry."

Sheila lingered.

"Run along now," she repeated, "there's nice roses over that way," indicating a pink section of prairie.

Nell, while engrossed in rendering arduous assistance at the grave, could give the strange child no thought; but later, as Sheila returned with her own children, their faces framed by armfuls of bloom, she wished that she might keep her. If Tim had only got that loan—

The black mound turned pink as offerings—short stemmed, long stemmed, and pulled out by the roots—were laid upon it.

Tim tossed his shovel into the wagon, then looked intently toward the west. Nell's eyes soon focussed there, too. There was a wagon on the trail. Sheila's father had hitched his jaded horses and was swinging his wreck of a wagon off toward the Sioux River.

Nell, an arm about the cowering Sheila, wondered on the justice of fate. It must be God's will, that's all.

This morning I prayed for help—for food for my children, and I received no answer but another mouth to feed. Aloud she said, "Well, Tim, there are worse things than hunger."

Tim said nothing; but that evening as he fixed a makeshift bed in the loft he tried to hide with a bantering "Always room for one more," the immensity of his own misgivings.

CHAPTER III

IT was summer again, and the Iowa prairie was a study in green and gold and pink. Patches of ripening barley, oats and wheat were diminutive islands in the green sea. Corn waved green fronds and nodded golden tassels. Sweet Williams vied with the wild roses in flooding the unbroken lands. And the summer sunlight, tempered by the ever-blowing south breeze, cast a sheen over the whole which dazzled the eye and gladdened the heart.

The Connors had one hundred acres under cultivation. What with all the wild hay they wished to cut, they were assured a bountiful harvest. Interest would be paid, necessary machinery bought, and there would be *food*—food for all. The Lord was indeed providing. It was well. . . . During the winter Kitty Ann had been crowded from her cradle by a new brother, Robert Emmet; and the girl Sheila who had been thrust into their keeping was being cared for as their own.

During the year that Sheila had been with the Connors, she had slipped into their lives as unobtrusively as if she had been there the ten years of her existence. She accepted their care, their chastisings and their love as unquestioningly as a stray kitten. She had always had enough to eat; it had never occurred to her whether Nell and Tim Connor had or not. During the past winter, oh, she had tired of corn mush and potatoes. And the way they cooked potatoes! They boiled them, then peeled them, then mashed them on their plates

and flooded them with milk. While she secretly longed for the sweets that she had had in Wisconsin, she learned how to thank God for the potatoes and to ask Him for "a continuance of the same" food. She had enjoyed especially the variety in game and the baked eggs — prairie chickens', partridges' and plovers' — which they had gathered in their aprons after the old grass had been burned off in the spring. Now there were garden vegetables; and an occasional sheep sorrel pie sweetened with molasses. Sheila liked molasses; but the molasses, bought in jugs on the rare trips to town, didn't last long. And as for sugar—they had none.

Although Sheila was often displeased with the food at the new home, she liked her attic bedroom. There was isolation in the loft. The low roof gave her the sense of protection which Danny had suggested one day.

"Sheila, your room is like an old hatcher covering yuh. See, the roof is her wings and that one window is the old hen's eye."

During the past year the low roof had indeed shut out many fears. Daylight had always been pleasant in the loft; but when she had been a stranger there, the moonlight had played tricks on her by contorting the storage into grotesque heads and extending arms.

At such times she had called below to Nell: "I'm afraid up here. There's big heads and funny faces trying to get me."

Nell would climb up a few steps of the ladder. "There's nothing there, child. Say the prayer to your guardian angel and close your eyes tight. I'll stay here

till you go to sleep and the first thing you know it will be morning."

Thus Sheila soon forgot her fears. Even rain on the roof added to her sense of security. She defied hail, daring it to break through her roof. In time of dangerous winds she was called.

"Sheila, hurry down. The roof may go." Or: "Come below, the chimney may fall."

When distant prairie fires lighting her room awakened her, she listened to the voices below. If their tone was assuring, though tumble-weeds shot into the air like balls of fire, she fell asleep.

One summer morning as she dreamily lay abed, she speculated on how she should spend the day. There would be the cattle to take out, as usual. If Danny would accompany her they would go far—perhaps over to Mill creek and chase those baby deer or drown out gophers. Danny, though three years her junior, was able to keep pace with her; but on every possible occasion she would "dodge out" of taking Margaret, and Kitty Ann.

When the aroma of cooking food reached her attic room, she bounded from her bed, hastily put on her dress, and descended the ladder. Her smooth tanned legs appeared below; there was a sudden leap from the fourth lowest rung to the middle of the kitchen floor, and she stood before Nell.

Nell, with the plump baby in her arms, was preparing breakfast. They exchanged no greetings; but Nell looked fondly at the girl as she burrowed her head of wavy red hair into Robert Emmet's chest. The baby pulled her hair without mercy and crowed with delight,

his rosebud mouth assuming in his excessive mirth the shape of a leaf.

Nell, her hair tightly drawn away from her small ears, the thinness of her face augmented by her slightly high cheekbones and pointed chin, her small, close-knit body shapeless in a calico wrapper, wondered when Sheila's head of hair would look like it saw the tooth of a comb. How she had brushed and cared for that hair the past year, and how wilfully it loosed itself and became tangled! "Child, your back's buttoned wrong," and disengaging one hand she adjusted the dress. "You didn't wash your feet last night."

The girl did not answer, but placed the cleaner foot atop the one which showed the greater neglect.

"Wash yourself now and set the table," Nell commanded patiently as she withdrew the baby.

After breakfast, Nell gave Danny the water pail and suggested that he accompany Sheila with the cattle, and together they could gather some wild strawberries. Tim had remarked on the great abundance of them, "over west." Immediately Margaret and Kitty Ann clamored to be allowed to go also.

Sheila would have preferred to have no additional duties assigned her other than keeping the cows from the patches of cultivation, but she said nothing; she rarely expressed her likes or dislikes as did the young Connors.

"Get your bonnets now, and keep them on," Nell said, marshaling them about. "Remember, keep them on. Sheila, I declare, is as brown as a berry; and Margaret, I can't tell you from a turkey egg. Your complexions will be ruined for life."

Duly coiffured and admonished, the children set off. From the doorway Nell watched the four dark specks assume the motion of the grass as the enveloping blue sky rocked the prairie in its arms.

The children, meanwhile, explored the area of which they unknowingly had become a part. Kitty Ann and Margaret held up savory-looking discoveries, asking of the elder two: "Will this deaden me? Will *this* deaden me?" Sheila held Kitty Ann by the hand; and Danny, who should have been caring for Margaret, found a chicken hawk's nest—four blue eggs surrounded by a few sticks. Should he destroy it? The hawks had been carrying off Mom's chickens. . . . The eggs were so blue. . . .

"Margaret's gone!" Sheila shouted.

The hawk's nest was forgotten. Danny ran through the grass, shouting: "Margaret, Margaret, stand up now. Answer, Margaret. Margaret, answer or you can't never come again."

"What if she is really lost this time?" Sheila asked fearfully, as dragging Kitty Ann along she came up with Danny. Young stock was often lost. Why not children? And Mom had warned them so!

Danny pushed back his wreck of a straw hat, and with his calloused soles rubbed his shins, which were bleeding from his recent search through rose bushes and knife-edged grass. "I'll put for home and get Mom. Keep this place now," he warned Sheila. "Don't stir from this spot."

As he started for home, Margaret arose from where she had been lying in a patch of flowers. She had been listening to the murmur of the flowers as the wind

blew through their petals. Her freckled face was flushed with ecstasy, her blue eyes round with wonder, as she related what she had heard in her retreat. "Flowers don't want to be picked; they want to be kissed."

Kitty Ann, her bonnet off, her curls in damp ringlets, delighted at this time to wildly pull off colored blooms and allow the wind to blow them from her hands. Thereupon Margaret brought down a righteous arm upon her sister's yellow head.

"Oh, Margaret," Danny said disgustedly, "you ought to be licked. I'm going to tell Mom, and the next time you'll stay home." He held her viciously by the wrist, and the four continued their way.

On reaching the indicated strawberry patch, they ate as they filled the pail. The berries were not very large, so the sun was high before they had finished. Then Danny encircled the cattle and headed them about. All started for home behind the herd.

They had not gone far when Kitty Ann cried to be carried. No sooner had Sheila raised her to her arms than the child was prostrate in sleep, her arms relaxed about Sheila's neck, her dress torn, and her stumpy bare legs red from the stain of wild strawberry. Danny carried the pail, held fast to Margaret, and shouted to the cattle.

In the grass about the feet of the passing herd darted frenzied nesting meadow larks. Then from stations on swaying grass and flower, they raised their heads to the blue sky, inflated their yellow throats, and poured forth a thanksgiving.

Bird songs; wind whispering to the flowers; insects on the wing; subdued murmurs of moving grass; voices of children—a prairie diapason.

CHAPTER IV

SINCE the battered covered wagon carrying Sheila to the Connors had disappeared in the west, many other prairie schooners had passed, and paused at Tim Connor's door. Lands east of the Mississippi were becoming too crowded for the real frontiersmen and they were moving farther on; Europeans, too, were being attracted by the cheap lands in the open prairie.

There had been a good crop in northwestern Iowa; a boom was on. Land agents from Fort Dodge and Sioux City with well-matched, spirited teams and shiny carriages dashed about, selling and locating. They chewed tobacco, swung a tasseled whip, and expatiated on the good crops, the motley of flowers, the level land and the black soil. . . . "The garden spot of the world."

But people whose eyes were accustomed to timber were skeptical.

"No streams; no hills; no shade; no protection," they argued.

"Who wants trees to wear their lives away grubbing them out?" the salesman answered disgustedly. "Plant your own trees. Place them where you want them. Land like this will grow anything—even tropical foliage."

When occasion demanded, the agent stopped his horses abruptly, removed a spade from beneath the seat and handed it to the prospect, commanding: "Here;

dig in and see what the soil is—*black*, clear down to China."

Yes, the soil was black and loamy, they admitted; but where would they obtain fuel?

Oh, the good Lord and the buffalo had provided for that. There was that sea of waving grass that made the most wonderful fuel in the world. Then, too, the buffalo bones and the buffalo chips needed only the gathering.

Some said timidly: "I'll try farther west—just a little farther—around the Sioux."

"If you value your life don't cross the Sioux . . . Indians!"

"Indians!"

"Yes, Indians."

Boom! Sell! Mortgage!

A Dutch colony was being formed on the east bank of the Sioux River. To the south of Connors', German immigrants were settling in what was later known as Low German township. Luxemburgers and Austrians, too, were filtering in and staking out grounds for kinsmen to follow.

The Dutch, arriving in amazingly large numbers, were decidedly clannish. Many came direct from Holland; others had belonged to a colony a little farther east. A few of their leaders were well educated. Reports of their perseverance and thrift were carried among the scattered settlers by land agents. "The Dutch are here. Real wooden-shoe Hollanders. Took up a whole county, swamps and all. . . . They ain't afraid of a little water. They know how to work. They'll show yuh how to pay for a farm in a few years."

At this last Tim Connor smiled. "The devil they can. Let us see them do it."

Nell, though starving for companionship, did not complain of the unfriendliness of the Dutch. Despite their isolation, she rejoiced that they were located between her children and the Indians. Their strength and solidarity gave her assurance: she knew that in time of need they would be a dependable ally, stubborn and unyielding as the prairie sod which they had come to break. "God bless the Hollanders," she said often. "At night now I don't have to be watching the west imagining every moving thing an Indian. I feel like there was a garrison of soldiers over there. God bless the Hollanders."

The other groups of immigrants were from various parts of the German Empire. They were divided by innate prejudices and traditions and were bitterly antagonistic to each other. Unlike the Dutch, they had no trained leaders; and recognizing their handicap in not being able to speak English, they clustered around Connor as an advisor.

Thus Tim became known as "Der Englishmann." Tim, a native of Ireland and a Fenian sympathizer, smiled grimly at the appellation. "The devil's own name. So it is."

But Tim proved himself a friend. It was no easy task keeping harmony among peoples who had carried all the enmities of their nations across the water and allowed them to flourish in their new propinquity.

It was not long, however, before Luxemburger, High German, and Low German knew that while Tim could aid them in business transactions and in settling dis-

putes, they could advise him on farming. They refrained, nevertheless, from suggesting aids in the preparation of soil, details of machinery, and innumerable bits of knowledge upon which they, who had been peasants in Europe, were quite well informed.

Tim had had no previous experience in farming. His father in Ireland had been a professor. Tim had come to America as a lad with ambitions to become a lawyer. His greatest possessions were a kind heart and a sense of humor. His jests, however, were often lost on his lately formed associates, but they were nearly always appreciated by Nell. Tim could meet with careless banter a difficult situation. There were no fears in the young Connors' lives when Tim was there. Nell sometimes wondered if Tim knew fear or worry.

Nell was less adept at hiding her grief and worry from the children. "Put on your nice face, Mom," she was sometimes reminded when she brooded on conditions and saw the results of Tim's impracticability. Nell, herself, knew nothing of farming. She was a doctor's daughter and was left an orphan at an early age. When she was seventeen she spent a summer with an aunt and uncle at North Hadley. And there she met Tim Connor.

Tim and several other young men who were studying law in Judge De Wayne's office in Springfield were up at North Hadley picking tobacco on the Judge's farm. They spent their evenings serenading the comely young ladies in the village. Nell immediately became interested in the Irish tenor who sang so persistently below her window. They became engaged. After their marriage they lived in Northampton, and Tim discontinued his study of law and worked for a cutler.

A few years later, when they were out beyond the Mississippi engaged in the grim battle of living, there were yearnings, of course, for the old life. Nell religiously banished them and instead wove a future for her children, fashioned from the warp and woof of her old life and colored with the mystery of the new life on the prairie. These dreams of stark beauty and majesty carried her on like a sweep of prairie wind. And though her back grew broad and her hands became rough, she retained a dignity and a look of fragility which caused other settlers' wives to chide Tim for bringing such a woman to the West.

Nell had never taken any especial interest in the medical environment in which she had been reared, but unconsciously she had become acquainted with practical remedies and had acquired an ability in meeting emergencies. It was through her efficiency in the sick-room that distant settlers first became acquainted with her. She took many midnight horseback rides, perched behind some morose man with whom she could not converse and to whom she could only cling as he, in his anxiety, urged his horse to a continuous gallop.

The many dialects in use in the neighborhood were confusing to her, but all managed in one way or another to make themselves understood. Nell secretly longed for a woman with whom she could converse easily; she also wished for a near neighbor. Although northwestern Iowa was becoming settled, land all about the Connors' was still held by eastern speculators and was not on the market. When Tim spoke enthusiastically of the influx of people and the number of wagons passing, Nell answered less exultantly: "Why do so many go by? Why

don't they stop near *us?* I'm so tired of the emptiness and loneliness. I want to hear stakes driven into the ground; I want to hear a constant clamor . . . voices."

"Well, if it's stakes you want, any one of us can go out and drive stakes."

Ignoring his evasive reply, Nell continued: "But stakes mean it's sold—taken over, occupied. I know we're not alone on the frontier any more, but I want to *see* the houses and the smoke, and have people to talk to close by . . . someone to run in for a piece of an afternoon."

"They'll soon be here," Tim answered assuringly. "They're still clustering around streams; but they're bound to come. You wait and see."

"I've waited four years now, and no one has settled very near."

"They're coming."

CHAPTER V

THE next spring Tim's prophecy was fulfilled. The Connors had near neighbors. One morning when the grain was pushing up its tender green shoots in the black patches of cultivation, Tim hitched Buck and Spec to the breaking plow and went east to assist a newcomer in erecting a sod house. Nell was jubilant at the prospect of having a neighbor only a mile away. She would have liked to accompany Tim and to welcome the newcomer, but she did not wish to leave little Ellen, the new baby of the house, who was croupy. Danny, Sheila, Margaret and Kitty Ann, however, trailed after Tim to get acquainted with the Schwartzes.

John Schwartz's family, consisting of himself, his wife and seven sons, drove no stakes in building their home; but after their arrival, the immediate neighborhood was never lacking in clamor. They were originally from Germany, but had lived in Minnesota for a few years.

The Connor children, on greeting them, stood in a row before the Schwartzes similarly grouped and ranging from Nick, a lad about sixteen years old, to Vil, a curly-headed baby. There were both blonds and brunettes in the Schwartz family, but this morning they looked alike, as they were covered with the dust and grime of travel. Immediately Nick and Ditz and Pete and Herman, the four oldest, individualized themselves: Nick by chewing tobacco and expectorating promiscuously; Ditz by his grimace—a new one to the Connors

—made by dragging down the lower eyelids with one hand and tilting the nose with the other; Pete by calling out to Sheila: "Hello, English red-head;" and Herman by his slate upon which he had drawn a miscellaneous display of animals and flowers. Herman, his eyes sparkling, stepped out from the Schwartz formation and held out his slate. The Connors warily gathered about him.

"There's a cat," Danny said, timidly pointing to an exhibit.

"There's a rose," Margaret volunteered.

"Don't you like 'em, huh?" Herman asked Sheila, who had proffered no opinion.

"Yes," she began to say, as Ditz grabbed the slate, spat upon it, and erased it upon the back of his jeans.

The Connors huddled together as Herman patiently rescued the slate, withdrew to a safe distance, and began to reproduce his works of art.

Schwartz, who had been speaking to Tim in intelligible English, came over to his sons and addressed them in German. He was a dark man with narrow slits of eyes from which he looked sideways. The Connors forgot their fear in watching him gesticulate. He had a crooked thumb!

Katto Schwartz, unobserved before, appeared and joined in conversation. She was not formidable looking: fat, blond, and squatty, with a pug nose at variance with her square, stolid face. Her voice was guttural and raucous.

Her husband informed her that Tim had said it was good luck to erect the sod house on the spot where they had stopped their covered wagon.

"Ya," she turned to Tim. "Sleep in water. You want us to get our skin wet, eh?" She swung around, pointed to a barely perceptible rise of land. "No." Ironically: "On what you call a big hill there. My house shall be there."

Connor nodded. Schwartz acquiesced.

She continued her generalship. She handed baskets to the older boys and equipped herself with the dishpan, and all began carrying sods to the indicated elevation.

Thus the Schwartzes became permanent.

"Better run along home, childer," Tim directed; and his brood took to their heels, dragging Kitty Ann along, to tell Nell of the strange, interesting people.

"They're Indians, Mom. I bet yuh they're Indians," Danny shouted, on reaching the house first.

"Hardly, child," his mother answered. Nell was ripping heavy black silk from an umbrella which Tim had won at the cattle show at Amherst. The material would make dresses for the two little girls. "No, Danny, why do you think that? They're cousins of the Brickners . . . don't you remember the Brickners, that stopped here with those pretty little twins?"

"Well, they act like Indians, anyhow."

Nell looked questioningly at Sheila.

"They're all boys," she said, unimpressed, and picked up baby Ellen, who was cooing in her cradle.

Margaret, who had recently listened to the discourses of Sheila and Danny as they recited their Catechism, found in these neighbors the embodiment of a group newly-added in her world of fantasy.

"They're devils," she said laconically.

When Tim returned home, later on, he smiled and

shook his head. To Nell's inquiries he answered: "Nice enough man, but a hector of a woman, and holy terrors of childer."

Nell frowned uneasily. The black material was now washed, and pressed, and cut into two dresses. She was gathering a full skirt to a tiny waist. Her stitches were uneven. She ripped them. Tim had verified the children's impressions. These, then, were to be her children's companions. And she had hoped that they would be people whom they could emulate!

For the moment she forgot her sewing, was unaware of Tim's presence. She looked out of the small window. Her children had nothing but the prairie, and it held nothing for them. Was it destitute, this green that extended away out there until it met the blue sky? Fruitful land. It was a fruitful land. Her eyes became lighted. She saw herself and other women bringing the heritage of the East and planting it in that prairie sod. Couldn't love and deprivation purify it? Could it not be fired with a love of the ideal so that in time it would blossom into a Spirit? A Spirit that would bear the culture of the East. A Spirit that would enter into the hearts of the children.

Tim stood by, painstakingly scraping the bowl of his corncob pipe with his knife. He divined something of Nell's thoughts; but he knew that the Spirit set free here would be not of the East nor of far-away places. It would be a Spirit of *this prairie,* and it would enter into the hearts of its children! How could the young ones whose eyes daily saw a world of beauty bounded only by heaven became identical with those who tossed jack-

stones on scrubbed sidewalks! This new West would have children of its own.

He said nothing to his wife. After he had left the house, Nell picked up the black silk dress. There was an ecstatic look on her face. "I wonder, can we save it for 'em? I pray we can. The schools will help."

Connors were hardly accustomed to the proximity of the Schwartzes when Max Steindler arrived and bought a section of land adjoining Connors on the north. Steindler's arrival was heralded by rumors of money, and there was the hauling of much lumber. His large house, a barn and smaller buildings, were viewed for miles around. Tim met Max and described him as a blustering old fellow with a grayish-red beard and long hair. "Regular old Robinson Crusoe."

Max Steindler's wife and six grown daughters, satellites governed by his whims and wishes, arrived after the buildings were completed. They immediately became known as the wife of Max and the daughters of Max.

The first time that Nell saw the wife of Max was a few days after her arrival. Nell was sewing, making a dress for Sheila from one of her own full skirts, when there was a gentle knock at the door. Sheila opened the door to a timid little woman. Her hardy body was bent a trifle forward, and she shifted her weight on the doorstep. Her voice, too, was hesitant.

"Is your mother home?" she asked.

Nell answered in person. "Yes, come right in. You're Mrs. Steindler, aren't you?" she asked, shaking hands.

"I'm Max's wife," the caller answered, smiling, showing square yellow teeth across which her narrow lips stretched tightly. There was a twinkle in her bright

brown eyes. Her face was small, its skin dried into a series of wrinkles. She rubbed her hands together; her hands were small, the joints knobbed.

"No, thank you, Mrs. Connor," she said. "I can't come in. I come to tell you my Annie lost her shawl, I think on your land." Her voice grew lower. "If you find it once, don't bring it back when Max will see you. Max he don't know it's lost." She looked at Nell entreatingly.

Nell assured her. "If we find it, we'll get it back as you suggest. You don't know how glad I am for near neighbors," she said, clasping the woman's hand again. "Come in a bit. I have no tea, but we can have a cup of hot coffee. It's a little chilly this morning."

"No, no, Mrs. Connor." Max's wife said, turning and reluctantly withdrawing her hand. At mention of food her thoughts had automatically reverted to her husband. "No, I must hurry home and make Max's dinner." She went down the step and turned about again, smiling her wide smile. "Some other time I come, thank you." She hurried away, her gait a trot, a measured trot.

Standing in the doorway, Nell watched the movement of the small body with the narrow, stooped back until it disappeared.

Danny found the missing shawl and wished to return it. He was rather curious about the family, and wanted to learn details of the wonderful buildings.

"I'll go myself," Nell said. "Then I'll be sure that the shawl will be returned unbeknownst to that bear of a man. I must go and see them anyhow."

Leaving Sheila to care for the children, she set off next morning for the Steindlers'. As she walked across the

prairie, she experienced a sense of freedom from household cares. It was the first time that she had been out of the yard since Ellen was born, three months before. She looked about at the growing grain, which was still in the grass stage. Her way was a sea of green. A breeze whipped her along. Meadow larks accompanied her for great stretches and then disappeared; others took up the refrain. Violets and bluebells reached up to her from the grass. She stooped occasionally and gathered those most tempting. She hummed a little, sang snatches of old songs. The sun grew hot. Slipping her own shawl from her shoulders, she folded the truant shawl within.

As Nell neared Max's farm, the pretentious buildings in the center of the six hundred and forty acres were glaringly white in the sun. The windows were fiery eyes which from their point of vantage oversaw the entire section which seemed to be astir. A drove of red cattle was being herded by two girls. Nell stopped and talked to them. They were Katie and Tilly. One had the flashing brown eyes of her mother, the sparkle, however, not smouldering but vivacious; the other, not less comely, had red hair and freckles. They were neither the youngest nor the oldest. Annie, the youngest, was snaring gophers, and the older ones were helping with the breaking.

Nell already had discerned two of the elder. Walking on, she passed them handling a large team of horses and a breaking plow. So intent were they upon their task that they scarcely raised their heads as she spoke to them. Nell stood for a moment. She heard the wrenching of stubborn roots of grass like ligaments tearing in a human body, followed by smoother passages where the

share cut into the soil with a murmur like that of gurgling blood. The full skirts and long-curtained bonnets of the girls blew in the spring breeze; their shoulders and arms curved, contorted and grew rigid as they clung each to a plow handle while the horses with lowered heads tautly stretched their traces.

Nearer the house, Nell encountered another daughter who was also assisting with the breaking. She walked beside a yoke of oxen, directing them with a goad while a young hired man held the plow handles.

The wife of Max met Nell at the door with a furtive smile and led her into the house.

Max was sitting on a chair in the middle of the sunny kitchen, soaking one of his feet in a basin of water. The other foot, well stockinged, was resting on a second chair. Although he smiled at Nell as he spoke, he also cast her a malevolent look from his small gray eyes which added to the savageness of his general aspect, the long, foxy beard and hair. Nell felt his eyes upon her as she talked to his wife. She glanced at him again. He lowered his eyes . . . She felt that he was a coward.

The wife of Max showed Nell about the house. They paused in the doorway of the parlor which was devoid of furniture and had the odor of fresh plaster.

"Nice for your girls to have a parlor, isn't it?" Nell remarked.

The woman answered: "Oh, I feel so bad for my gels. I got so many gels and none are married. My Mary got a chanst back in Dyersville, but we move away." The situation was truly tragical to her.

Nell, at first, could not refrain from smiling. "Don't

worry," she said. "There's lots of time. Schwartzes over there have seven boys."

The wife of Max could not smile. "My gels," she went on, "they got it so hard here. That is why I want that they should marry quick."

Nell became serious. "That plowing is pretty hard for a girl . . . such young girls. I never saw the likes before."

The man in the kitchen listened grimly as his wife continued in a low tone: "I want *I* should go for Lena today. She ain't so good," she said significantly, "— but I must fix the water for my man's foot."

At which the man in the kitchen called curtly: "Hot water."

His wife ran to administer to him, and Nell addressed him affably: "Nice set of buildings here. Ever farm before?"

Max wriggled the toes on his submerged hairy foot a while before responding. "Yes, I farm before. I am a farmer, but not such a farmer as your man. . . . He's in county seat today and his corn not planted. He can't farm," he said convincingly. "Small children no good for farmer. Dumb wife who don't stay at home and tend to her own business no good for farmer."

Nell faced the grizzled man and spoke up hotly, using the vernacular: "My man is in the county seat with a neighbor who wishes to insure his crop against hail. Someone had to help him . . . he can't talk a word of English." Her voice wavered. "I am a good wife and my man is good to me. Yes, he's good to me, and will never allow the children to work as I saw—" The terrified expression on the face of her hostess checked her. "Come

out and show me your new chicken coop before I go," she said, ignoring Max's chuckle.

There were tears in Nell's eyes as she returned the shawl to Max's wife behind the hen house. Max's wife was crying also.

"My man don't want that anyone should tell him that the gels must not work so hard. He thinks I tell you that you should say that," she said apologetically. She looked at Nell appealingly. "My man don't like it that they are all gels. . . . Oh, why for are they not boys?"

"I don't know," Nell answered.

Nell walked through the prairie grass toward her home. She had lost the rapture of the morning. The scene at the neighbor's had depressed her; but one thought seemed most vitally disturbing. No one thinks that Tim is any good as a farmer. Even that old bear. What does *he* know about Tim?

There were the Connors' buildings before her: the small house, weathered and unpainted; the tilted barn, with holes in the thatch where the hay had rotted away; the cottonwood grove forming a green hedge.

The door of the unpainted house swung open. Kitty Ann had sighted her and had given the alarm. Here they were, all coming to meet her, Sheila in the rear carrying Ellen. It was a race! Yes, Danny would win! Then Margaret! . . . No. Kitty Ann had passed Margaret by. . . . Poor little Robert Emmet tripped and fell headlong into the grass.

CHAPTER VI

MILL CREEK township was organized the following year. At the adjournment of the meeting each man present, with one exception, was entrusted with one or more offices. As Dutch Fred, the exempted member, expressed it: "I am the peoples. All the rest be officers. Don't it?"

Tim Connor was elected secretary of the school board and township trustee.

The county had been raising bonds for school purposes for several years, but graft had eaten up the funds and no buildings had been erected. Mill Creek township levied a tax for the purpose of building a school. Materials were ordered and the work finally began.

This, the first school in that part of the country, was known as "the corner school," since it was built on the intersection of north-south and east-west trails. The north-south trail was the direct route from the terminal of the railroad in the south to the lakes further north. The east-west trail was the former path of the buffalo, deepened by the streams of caravans going to seek their fortunes out West there just beyond the horizon. These trails, curving as they dodged deep sloughs, had a permanency although in the distance they were defined only by shadows.

Tim lost no occasion to secure "a man that was handy with a hammer" to hasten the completion of the school, but work progressed slowly owing to the scarcity of lumber. After the foundations, sides and roof were com-

pleted, shingles were delayed. This meant that the building could not be equipped and ready for use until fall.

The Connors meanwhile continued teaching the children at home, in a haphazard way preparing them for the systematic routine of school. Sheila could not read when she came to the prairie. Now she was able to work fractions, to spell quite readily, and to recite her Catechism. Sheila did not love study, but Nell kept her at it assiduously, horrified that the girl had known nothing of "God, man or the devil." Sheila was receptive and obedient, and she made progress.

"Nell Connor is not a stepmother," the neighbors often remarked to each other. It was true. Nell loved Sheila, and cared for her more painstakingly than she did for her own. Often she watched Sheila, analyzing her, wondering, admiring. The prairie wind did not freckle her as it did the Connors. It tanned her an even golden tan. The scorching sun bleached her red hair until it was the shade of wild honey. The care of that hair was an irksome trial to both Sheila and Nell. It defied string and pin and persisted in hanging free about her shoulders. Sheila's eyes were dark brown, her eyebrows black and narrow, almost meeting over her narrow nose. Her skin was smooth, conforming well to her supple body, which had lately taken on the curves of adolescence. Nell was giving her tansy tea.

In addition to the study at home, the pictures on the Connors' walls were factors in the education of the children. Some of these in heavy frames and a few clipped from periodicals and newspapers suggested Bible stories, and tales of history. All the older children could relate the stories of *The Last Supper*, *The Landing of the Pil-*

grims, and *The Trial of Robert Emmet;* but only Danny could identify those referred to by Tim as "the rogues' gallery." Danny would rattle off: "There's Mom's Uncle Henry at Hadley; there's Abraham Lincoln what freed the slaves; there's Horace Greeley, the first man that Pop ever voted for in this country; there's Walt Whitman, the man that Mom don't like but Pop does. He wrote that about the prairie grass—'The prairie grass dividing, its special odor breathing. I demand of it the spiritual . . .' What's the rest o' that, Pop?"

Each child had a favorite picture. Margaret would stand transfixed before *Waiting for the Tide at Venice,* wondering when that boat would move; and little Robert Emmet associated himself in a vague way with the tall young man standing erect in that walnut frame, trying to vindicate himself in the face of those stern, wigged puppets.

Another source of enlightenment at the time was a mission church which was established at Casper Center by Father Leurmann. Connor and his family attended Mass whenever possible. Here Sheila was baptized and received the name: Sheila Moore Connor.

"You're Sheila Connor now," Nell said. "You belong to us."

Nell's bits of sentiment were embarrassing to Sheila. She did not know just how to receive them. She remained quiet, but smiled. Nell's announcement was no revelation to her . . . she had always been Sheila Connor, hadn't she? Reference had been seldom made to her true parentage, and then only when Nell was called upon by some curious but well-meaning mover to account for the disparity of years between her and Danny.

Sheila was now eligible to join a class of boys and girls for "special instruction," and during the summer she made her first Communion. On this occasion Nell allowed Tim to remain at home with the children, and she herself accompanied Sheila, driving the oxen twelve miles to be present at the solemn event.

Sheila wore a new white dress, and her mass of curls were lustrous and intact, Nell having protected them during the long ride with a heavy scarf. A woman living near the church opened her house to the communicants and their mothers, and here Nell drew out her wedding veil from a box and draped it over Sheila's curls. While other women were adjusting wax wreaths, Nell unearthed from a damp paper a dainty spray of bluebells which she had gathered and woven into a chain the night before.

When Nell saw Sheila in the procession, her eyes grew moist. She wondered about the girl's mother. Sheila was not only different from the Connors; she was different from the children around her. There was something truly distinctive about her. As she passed with her easy, graceful stride, her face like the others wore a look of rapture; but the deep, dark eyes held a mystery which frightened Nell. For love her and do for her as she might, she feared that she could never wholly understand her.

When the children were grouped before the altar of the crude little church, Nell knelt and prayed. She asked God to guide her in raising Sheila and to protect the girl from all harm to soul and body. "I want to do the very best I can for her. Help me. Guide me."

She kissed Sheila after the service, saying: "I hope

you will always remain as pure and sweet as you are today."

On the way home Nell's thoughts reverted to the baby. In her zeal for Sheila perhaps she had been negligent of her own. . . . Ellen was such a wee baby. She tried to hurry the oxen, but unmindful of exhortations or goad their pace remained unchanged. Resigned, she spoke of school in the fall. How fortunate they were now to have a school! She had been planning somewhat on what they would wear. There was a wine-colored silk that she had been saving. Now she would make it over for Sheila.

CHAPTER VII

ONE sunny September morning, the first day of school in Mill Creek township, the Connors rose very early. It was a momentous day. *The children were starting to school!* It was the beginning and it would lead . . . well, God knows where. While Nell prepared the breakfast, she allowed herself to dream and to hope. There was a vision of Sheila going back East to school—to Mt. Holyoke. Sheila would lead the way. The others would follow. Danny to Amherst—Nell checked herself guiltily as she realized there were so many, many present needs, and the future was so far away. But who could tell?

After Tim went threshing, Nell arranged Sheila's hair in eighteen long curls, brushing each painstakingly around her finger. Sheila wore the wine-colored silk. The soft material clung to her supple young body, and Nell was pleased with her efforts. The beginning would be auspicious, and she would trust in God for its continuance. She must have a ribbon to tie some of those curls. Nell went to the bedroom and clipped a ribbon from a bonnet worn on her wedding trip to Boston—one of the few treasures that she had kept intact—and tied it on the girl's hair.

Danny had his hair shingled and wore a new gingham suit. His face shone with soap and his eyes with anticipation. "Gosh! Going to school!" he ejaculated at intervals.

Margaret allowed herself to be washed and her soft

brown hair fixed in ringlets; then she cried, as she had no book. Danny had a second reader, and Sheila many books, including *David Copperfield*, which served as a reader. Nell took down the *Almanac* from its nail and gave it to Margaret to appease her. "Now you have a book, too," she said comfortingly. "We'll have new books after the threshing is done. Hurry on, children, and don't be late."

Eighteen other children walked miles through the dewy prairie and assembled with the Connors at the corner school. Many of them had never been in a school building; nor had they, owing to the clannishness of different settlements, become acquainted with each other. Somewhat awestricken they huddled together—feudish impulses for the moment forgotten—and gaped at the clean white walls, the twelve shiny double seats, the six bright windows, the patch of blackboard, the round-bellied stove, and the teacher.

The boys wore wool caps and hats of straw or felt—whatever they happened to have—pulled down with disregard for courtesy or lopped ears. Shirts and make-shift pants of gingham or jeans extending to the ankle completed their attire. The younger boys still held the appeal of babyhood.

The girls' tight waists and full skirts were made-overs of various materials: linsey-woolsey, muslin, calico, silk. Many of these had been garments worn by their elders when they came into the country. Their hair was tightly braided or hanging open for the day.

All shifted about on their bare feet and stared at the strange man before them.

Teacher, in an armchair, officially opened and closed

the drawers of his table; then rose to the height of six feet, two inches; moved his basket of lunch to a more suitable corner of his desk; placed a sledge-hammer fist upon the *Webster's International Dictionary;* looked down with bead-like eyes over an extravagant length of nose; and addressed the children.

"I am your teacher," he began. "My name is Jerome Loutch. I hope in time to know your names and to learn you to read and write. I hope you all have books and slates." Here his oratory ceased and his voice struck a less formal note. "You little fellows sit up here together," he said, leading two to the front seat. They moved reluctantly, looking anxiously at their elders. "You girls sit here. Larger ones in back."

Walking among them, he paired them off. As most of the families represented were large and of corresponding ages, it came about that members of unfriendly cliques were placed side by side in double seats. *A Breidbarth with a Schwartz!*

Margaret refused to occupy the seat indicated with the small girl in the front of the room. Instead she sat with Sheila and buried her face in the older girl's lap.

"Won't you come up, Margaret?" Loutch encouraged.

Margaret's body stiffened, and a shudder ran through her.

"You'll sit up here tomorrow, won't you?" he said helplessly.

The room was very quiet. All faces were turned.

There was a stir in Sheila's lap. One moist blue eye appeared above the desk. The tone was unmistakable: "I ain't comin' morrow."

The tension of the room was broken by Margaret's audacity. Ditz Schwartz immediately ventured: "My brother can't sit with Heinie Breidbarth—he's *Low German.*"

This statement was like fire to a series of bombs. "You mustn't, you mustn't . . . here now—" Loutch began, as many of the children rose to their feet with protests.

"I can't sit by Emmie Steinberg. She got the lice, my mother say." Then, *sotto voce* to a neighboring ally: "Luxemburgers got the lice."

Epithets of *Luxemburger* and *Plattdeutsch* were hurled at each other, kicks and cuffs were exchanged. While Jerome Loutch stood scratching his thin pinkish hair and wondering just how much he could interfere without offense to patrons, the fruit basket was upset, and children carrying books and slates moved about the room. Loutch's position as teacher was rather hazardous at best, and he had been advised by the county superintendent to teach as peacefully as possible. By no means was he to arouse the wrath of patrons. He had not been warned of this strife. . . . This surely was an unusual state of affairs.

During the confusion, Danny's seatmate, Emil Grothe, had not moved. In some subtle way it was known that the Connors didn't count. The Connors were not in the fight.

For the moment, Danny was bewildered. This was not the kind of school that he had imagined. They needed no manners for school as Mom had said. He didn't seem to be learning much, but there were many interesting children around him. First of all, he was fa-

vored in his seat partner. Emil was lame: he had a shriveled foot. He had also a tubular pencil box, whose lid he had allowed Danny to crack off and on after he had moistened it generously with his tongue.

Louisa Beaver, sitting behind Danny, had a long white mark on her upper lip. And Ernest Probst, across the aisle, scraped his cheek against his shoulder until it bled. Hank Webber had a scooped mouth. Then, too, Herman Schwartz was drawing Teacher on his slate.

After the exchange of seats, there was a general quiet. Loutch ascended to his platform and called a class. The room had adjusted itself and in so doing the authority of the school had shifted from Teacher to the majority party—the High Germans. And Ditz Schwartz, the protagonist, who had six brothers, knew that he controlled Loutch.

When school was dismissed at four o'clock, difficulties brewing all day were settled by pitched battles wherein girls fought in defense of boys, brothers in defense of sisters. Teacher, carrying his empty basket, paused in the yard. "Children," he said, "the director will not allow this. Your parents will not allow this either. Now go home." Turning quickly, he set off toward his boarding place.

His admonition only stimulated the contestants and they responded by shouting challenges to him.

The Connors, already on their way, looked back and witnessed the fray. Bennie Hurd was with them. Bennie was connected with Hollanders, and exempt like themselves. He was from New Jersey and had come to Iowa to live with an aunt and uncle who were childless and

lonely. He was different from the other boys. His books were covered with calico, his face and hands were clean, and his clothes were "boughten." His aunt and uncle lived beyond the Connors, so he went part way with them. After he had left them to turn north, the Connors, very hungry, and anxious to tell their impressions of the day, quickened their pace.

CHAPTER VIII

"OH, he'll get the upper hand of 'em in a few days," Tim said comfortingly as he and Nell discussed the discipline of the school that evening. Tim sensed his wife's great disappointment in the school for which she had been praying for years. "They'll learn something and get on to the routine a bit," he said, climbing into bed. "I'm dog tired. . . . Another term the teacher may be better."

Nell stood by the bed and looked out to where the fields were flooded with moonlight. She told Tim about Margaret, how she had acted and what she had said. "All evening she cried whenever school was mentioned."

"Poor young one," Tim said, then chuckled. "Did Margaret say that? Bully for her. Let her stop at home. She's young and has plenty of time for school."

"If we give in now maybe she'll never want to go," Nell said, tucking in her fifth born.

"Margaret has a reasoning all her own," Tim argued.

"Aren't you afraid you'll be making her headstrong, Tim? And what bad manners it was in her! I'm just mortified—before all those children!"

Tim adjusted his pillow with a thump of finality. "Don't expect too much of 'em, Nell. A child will be a child, whether its grandfather was a land agent or a highwayman."

Sheila and Danny attended school regularly. Nell watched the cows at intervals and kept them from the

corn. Margaret remained at home and faithfully tended the baby while her mother was absent.

Margaret cared little for sharing Kitty Ann's games. She preferred making expeditions to visit her friends on the prairie. She had a personal interest in, and speaking acquaintance with, every bird and flower.

But Kitty Ann disregarded Margaret's favorites. With an air of utter abandon she chased butterflies, disturbed ant hills, and poked earth into gopher holes.

It was little Robert Emmet whom Margaret enjoyed having with her on her excursions. He was an avid listener. She showed him the fairies with the golden hair who lived down near the slough. "See 'em nod, Emmet, nod 'yes, yes' all the time?"

Robert Emmet, credulous, did not disagree as did Kitty Ann. He opened wider his round blue eyes, eager to span his ever-widening horizon, and clung with difficulty to Margaret's neck while his chubby legs grappled to find a footing on her curveless body.

"See 'em, Emmet? See 'em bow their heads and wave to us?"

"I see, I see," he answered.

"We can't go over there alone. The grass is too high. Sheila will take us some time," she promised, setting him heavily on the ground.

The days of autumn sunshine grew shorter and the nights were chilly. Nell hoped that the cold would hold off until the threshing was done and their trip made to town. She was busy with the eternal patching and making things over to keep her brood covered. It would be easier after the trip to town, when new materials could be obtained.

There was nothing in the line of fruit for fall preserving. Nell wished she might have some of the fruit that no doubt was wasting back East. She dried corn, however, and other vegetables and tied them in sacks. In the cave was kraut, and a barrel of cucumbers in brine.

They had had a good crop and a fine garden. She had helped with both. She had taken a man's place in haying and shocking. Work to her had become negligible—what was heavy work if obstacles were on hand to be overcome?

Tim had resented her help . . . he could manage.

They had harvested without hiring help. Now there were only the threshing and the corn husking, and Tim could take his time to these.

One crisp day of Indian summer, Nell sat outside the door in the afternoon. From this position she could watch the cattle as they grazed homeward, and also be near the toddling Ellen. It was warm and pleasant there, too.

The pollen-laden south breeze blew against her face. It lacked its earlier delicate scents and was pungent. The choruses of bird and insect were gone, but blackbirds congregating on the cottonwoods produced a dismal, interminable chatter.

"Sign of a death in the family during the year," was the superstition of such a visit of blackbirds. This thought saddened Nell for the moment, but she soon banished it as nonsense. Hadn't the birds visited them annually for two or three years without any such aftermath? Her family was entire, and a lovely family it was, healthy and bright and straight of limb. How she would like to dress them up and have them parade the streets

of Northampton. "Look! There are Tim Connor's and Nell Powers's children!" The family was entire, augmented, in fact—the covered wagon conspiring with the prairie stork. Nell smiled at her own humor. "As Tim says, 'A fool laughing at my own folly.' "

Baby Ellen in her meanderings had reached her knee. Nell gathered her into her arms and lulled her to sleep.

"God keep her," she prayed as she looked down at the sleeping child. "Keep her. Keep all of them. Guard their minds, their hearts and their bodies. . . . And I'll do my part," she added hopefully.

But when the children came from school and related the day's excitement, her spirits sank.

"This can't go on," she concluded. "We must look into it."

She was still in a perturbed state of mind while she did the evening chores; and when Tim drove in from threshing she accosted him before he had climbed from the wagon.

"Something must be done about the quarreling at school," she began. "That teacher can't cope with conditions at all. He's been giving two sets of recesses, one for each faction, and our brave Danny has been taking advantage of both. I was so in hopes that Loutch would come for his first month's wages and we could talk to him; but I suppose he'll wait now until both months are in. You'd better go and see him," she concluded, looking up at Tim.

"Is that all's the matter?" Tim said, standing up stiffly. "From the look on your face I thought the devil himself was to pay. It's you that can sing the Molly Bawn about nothing at all."

Yellow with chaff he crawled down over the wheel. Chaff was piled on his shoulders and in the creases of his felt hat. His eyes were bloodshot and unnatural with their powdered lashes. He had been threshing barley, and wore his shirt hanging outside his jeans like a smock.

He drew himself up before his wife, his tall body gaunt in the flowing shirt. "Why don't you go up yourself and see that simpleton?" he said. "I'll not be having the time." He tossed aside his hat and wiped his face with a grimy bandana. "Whew! the chaff in that wind was a fright. Danny, give a hand here."

Danny unhitched the traces and unbuckled the girths of Jack and Jule. Their muscles quivered as Tim raised the heavy harness from their sore shoulders. Danny led the horses to the trough, and Tim swung around. "Childer," he said, "what do you think of your Pop's white whiskers? Have a clean shirt for me, Nell, and a bit of warm water."

Nell did not go to see Jerome Loutch. The term would soon be over. The factions meanwhile continued to quarrel, and to read four times a day.

The primary class droned out *c-a-t* as Loutch pointed to the picture. Once Danny was called to the blackboard alone. At his mother's suggestion he had questioned the teacher on several occasions: "When are we going to have arithmetic?" The answer was always evasive; but one day he was startled as he was reading Bennie Hurd's *Arabian Nights* to hear: "Danny, go to the board and do some sums." Reluctantly he put aside the book, went to the board, and placed the correct answers after the

inscribed columns. Danny was studying his tables and long division at home, so addition was mere play; but the incident was important, as it was the only time Loutch had called a class in arithmetic. Bennie and Sheila had arithmetics from which they studied without school supervision. Often it was Bennie who helped Sheila when her dark eyebrows were brought together in a frown as the work seemed incomprehensible.

Danny was friendly to Bennie, also. Bennie was an example of the children who lived in that other world off there beyond the big slough, off farther than he had ever dared to venture. To the other boys, Bennie was no prototype; he was ignored as the Connors were ignored. Bullying them was not so stimulating as humiliating a Luxemburger or a Low German.

Herman Schwartz alone had a secret dislike for Bennie. Herman, though closely allied with the pugnacious element, was not an active member. He neither attacked the Low Germans nor defended his own. He spent his day drawing pictures on anything available. Already the schoolhouse walls were decorated with prairie sunsets; and the outbuildings were defaced with caricatures of Teacher. Loutch sought favor with the Schwartzes by allowing Herman to use his colored chalk at pleasure. He also agreed with Bennie that Herman had talent.

Herman disregarded Bennie's praise, antagonized him whenever possible, and sought favor with Sheila by giving her the dainties from his lunch. These things Sheila accepted with utter indifference, but ate with relish, much to Danny's disgust.

The equilibrium of the Connors' supper table was often disturbed by Danny's reference to Sheila's vora-

ciousness. "Sheila, you'd eat anything that Herman would give you. I'd be good and hungry before I'd eat what Katto baked. . . . Even the threshers couldn't eat there, could they, Pop?"

As Sheila said nothing, Nell rose to her defense. "Katto's all right, and Herman's different from the rest."

Danny was about to speak again, but Tim's "dry up now" silenced him.

Sheila was apparently unconvinced and unmoved. Though quiet, she would not forget Danny's insolence, and at some future time when the Connors had completely forgotten the incident she would slight Danny in some way and say softly, "That was for what you said about my eating Herman's lunches."

"In some ways Sheila is so different from us," Nell often said to Tim when they were alone.

"Yes, I notice it, too, since she's growing up; but you can't expect her to act like an Irishman, can you, when she isn't one?"

"No, I suppose that's it."

Sheila continued to share Herman's lunch, work her arithmetic, and read four times a day. The wine-colored silk was torn and patched, Danny's suit was in tatters, and the flour was gone. All were anticipating Tim's and Nell's trip to town.

CHAPTER IX

ONE morning toward the last of October, Tim announced that by noon the yearly threshing would be completed and he would be ready to start plowing up potatoes. This announcement was met with general applause. It indicated that the long-anticipated trip with the grist and the garden truck would be made next day.

In the afternoon Tim, true to his word, having hauled the wagon to the truck patch, hitched Jack and Jule to the plow. The bright shares cut into the baked ground, deftly turned under the crisp stalks, and unearthed the smooth potatoes. The Connor children, buckets in hand, fell upon them like a flock of yellowlegs.

The air still held the warm, drowsy feeling of Indian summer. Light clouds floated leisurely overhead. The prairie—stubble, corn and grass—was dredged with yellow. Occasionally wedge-shaped flocks of geese and ducks flew high to the south and melted into blue sky and misty cloud.

The children worked faithfully for a while. Sheila walked in the rear, as Nell suggested, and gathered potatoes overlooked by the more spirited. As she stooped, her hair, hanging over her shoulders, brushed the ground. When pails and baskets were filled, Danny climbed up on the hub of the wagon wheel and emptied them into the wagon box with a low, deep rumble.

Emmet was the first deserter. Casting aside his tobacco

pail, he watched a tumble-bug in a prodigious undertaking. Kitty Ann was tempted away by the white butterflies which sailed dreamily around the heads of cabbage. The task became irksome to Margaret when bursting milkweed pods scattered their silky down.

Nell worked in the garden with a broad, sharp knife. Bending with difficulty, she cut off cabbage. As the heads fell to the ground, shiny yellow drops oozed from their outer leaves. Danny deserted the potatoes to follow her, and with his jack-knife cut wedge-shaped pieces of stump, which all the children ate regardless of their earthy hands.

"Keep moving, children," Nell admonished. "Don't you want us to get your shoes tomorrow? Dig out some of those carrots with your knife, Danny, but don't break off the tops."

Tim had stopped at the end of a furrow, and with hands on his hips stood looking off to the south, where the fall growth of grass was thick and shoulder high.

"Come here, childer," he called.

When they had gathered around him, he pointed off to the dark brown flecks on the yellow, shimmering grass. The grass was lighted by the lowering rays of the sun and was stirred by the wind into soft, velvety ripples, endowed with life, moving ceaselessly, untiringly. Its brown flecks were running, running, racing, racing—but never free.

"Do you know what I see?" he asked. "I see big brown bears out there that are tied by their legs. They keep crawling along on their stomachs, but they can't get away."

Danny smiled. "Oh, I seen 'em lots of times. They're patches of ripe grass, Pop."

"Will they eat us?" Kitty Ann asked in alarm, raising a face the worse for carrots and black soil.

"No," Margaret assured her, "their legs are tied."

Rather bewildered, Emmet followed Danny and Sheila back to their work.

Only Margaret stood by.

"I wish I could see 'em better, Pop," she said, as Tim knew she would.

He lifted her to his shoulder.

"I know how they got there," she said ruminatively.

Tim waited. A moment went by. Jack and Jule impatiently stamped their feet and swished their tails at the flies.

"Don't you suppose it was seeds scattered down by the clouds?" Tim suggested cautiously. "Or was it the fairies?"

"Don't you know, Pop?" Margaret answered. "It was the queen of the fairies. The golden cups and saucers that the fairies picked up the dew in got stolen. They were robbed, robbed by Jessie James. So the fairy queen sent those bears to take care of 'em. And now they can't be robbed any more." Margaret laughed and hit her heels against Tim's chest.

"The bears'll fix the Jameses all right," he encouraged.

"And then—" Margaret continued.

The cry of baby Ellen reached the garden.

"Margaret, run to the baby," Nell called.

Margaret left off with her story, slid from her father's shoulder, ran to the cradle, and rocked it violently.

The sun sank lower; a chill came into the air. All the Connors repaired to the house and yard. Sheila worked on alone.

Standing in the last glare of the sun she felt the urge and pull of an enfolding adolescence. It caressed her, assured her. Life was sweet; life would be sweeter. She did not question who she really was nor why she was thrust into this family. She was fairly content with life now, but she saw in the glamour of the sunset tonight a prophecy that some day beyond that yellow horizon she would find the perfection, the fulfilment of a life that she now but vaguely felt.

She thought of the new shoes that would be obtained on the morrow. These, and the new dress, she would display at school . . . especially to Bennie Hurd and—perhaps, Herman Schwartz.

As she dreamed, mechanically reaching for potatoes, the east was lighted as though the earth had instantaneously rotated, causing a sudden dawn. Familiar bars of fire tinged the sky, and smoke rose from the dark fringed border. Tim and Nell hurried outside the grove and watched the east. The children gathered tearfully around them.

"Is prairie fire coming home?"

"Will it get us, Pop? Danny said 'twould get us."

While Nell herself looked at Tim before making reply, Danny spoke up: "Naw, can't get us. Wind's from the north."

"It's headed toward Cherokee," Tim enlightened them. "Hope it won't burn up the straw piles. Poor critters of cattle'll need them this winter."

After supper a dull glow still covered the land. The

Connors needed no lantern to complete their preparations. While Tim loaded the wagon with wheat and vegetables, Nell, Sheila, and Danny filled the poultry crates fastened to the rear of the wagon. Chickens drugged with sleep were pulled from trees and sheds; the roosters were crated, and the pullets, set free, went blindly into the dusk. When the children were put to bed the only evidence of the fire was a hazy sky and the pungent odor of burned grass.

Sheila, from her bed in the loft, heard Nell and Tim in their final discussion of the trip. The greatest item was shoes, shoes for all.

Nell, sitting at the kitchen table with the list in her hand, said: "The baby will be easy to fit, and Sheila's I can fit on myself. If they are a little large for me they will fit Sheila."

"Better be sure they're big enough," Tim advised, as he trimmed his beard at the cracked mirror in the kitchen.

"Well, come help me then, and let's measure their feet," Nell said, picking up a string.

They stood first over Danny's and Robert Emmet's bed. Emmet's head was nestled against Danny's shoulder. A mere baby with little chubs of feet. Danny, breathing deeply, his thin face wan in repose. The mouth was firm, the chin pointed.

"If that old ague will only stay away from him this spring," Nell said prayerfully.

"We'll get him a fine pair of copper-toed boots," Tim answered, as he measured a calloused foot and placed it beside its mate.

The lamp in Nell's hand cast a glow over Margaret's

and Kitty Ann's faces. Kitty, mischievous eyes closed, was doll-like with her mass of yellow curls. As she yielded her foot, a half-eaten carrot fell from her grimy hand.

Margaret opened her eyes and closed them again tightly. Her shoulders and arms, protruding from her underwaist, were thin. Her dark fringe of eyelashes increased the pallor of her face. Her nose, as usual, harbored a horseshoe of brown freckles.

"She's growing so tall, and you see Kitty isn't," Nell said.

Tim wiggled her toes a little as he measured her. "Our freckled-faced Maggie has a bit of the poet in her."

"Lord save us, Tim. Not poet. Poets don't have good reputations."

"Just said a little of the poet, Nell,—the desirable qualities. How's that?" he answered, looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

At which both smiled.

"Tim," Nell paused, lamp in hand, "do you know what day it is?"

"Yes, Thursday, and we're going on a spree tomorrow."

"Tim, you don't know. Think of the date."

"Indeed'n I do now, me girl. How many years? Not more than—Danny's ten—well, we'll have to add on a little."

"Tim, such talk. It's eleven years. Eleven years ago today, you and I went arm in arm out of my uncle's door and through the gate."

"Yes, and now come on. Tonight, eleven years after, you and I will go out of our own door—our own, not

counting the bit of a mortgage that's against it. But as they say in court, 'We have some equity in it.' "

Arm in arm they stood in the doorway.

"Not having a gate we can reproduce the scene no farther," said Tim.

They were silent for a while, their thoughts racing back and forth like shuttles over the past years and resting on the scene before them—the prairie, with its majestic sweep of land lighted by an unusual ruddy light.

Eleven years! Here was fulfilment . . . the sturdy little feet that were measured for shoes, and the wherewithal to buy the shoes. The loaded wagon, assuming immense proportions, testified to this. The doomed roosters, wakeful in their propinquity, agreed.

"Let's celebrate tomorrow," Tim spoke out. "What kind of a wedding is eleven years? Not a wooden wedding, is it?"

"I don't know what it is . . . nothing, I guess."

"I'll tell you. It's a slough-grass anniversary. Now that's something we can produce."

"Wouldn't that be funny?" Nell answered, entering into Tim's jovial mood. "Slough-grass anniversary."

"Yes," Tim went on, "and we have a yard here that could entertain the whole of Massachusetts and York state, too, and all your clan from Boston could come and we'd feed 'em rose haws, creamed rose haws, garnished with seeds and wigglers. How's that, Nellie?"

"Oh, quit your nonsense and come on in, Tim. We'll have to be up early in the morning."

CHAPTER X

THE Connors were astir early. Sheila woke to the thump, thump of Tim's boots on the kitchen floor. Nell was rattling stove lids; there was the aroma of barley coffee. Crated chickens squawked complainingly, and the privileged chanticleer left behind answered with a rising: "Ka, ka, ka, ka—what is it all about?"

A faint pink rimmed the eastern horizon. Recalling the day's duties, Sheila flung herself out of bed. This time tomorrow she would have a slate pencil. Hers must have a flag on it and must *not be broken.*

When she descended into the kitchen, Nell was tying on a black hood. Instructions which she had heard at intervals for two months were again repeated. "Don't let anything happen to the children; but if something does happen, send Danny for Katto. We're all out of meal, but you can get along. Boil potatoes, and give 'em plenty of milk. Be careful of fire—don't put in too much hay with the draft open. Keep Ellen dry and warm. She took a little cold yesterday. Don't let the children off in the tall grass." With this last which had not been included before: "On the top shelf of the cupboard there's a little brown sugar for the baby's milk." Nell fastened her broshay shawl and climbed into the wagon. "Good-bye now. We'll be back by nightfall."

By the time the younger children were dressed and Danny was ready to take out the cattle, the sun was hidden in a hazy gray sky. Danny rode to the house on Ned's back, and the children congregated around him.

(Ned was old and almost blind; he had been left behind by movers.)

"Look!" Danny pointed at myriads of ducks and geese flying swiftly to the south. "Well, must be movin'," he broke off importantly. He adjusted the gunny sack which served as a saddle, straightened his wiry, slim body, dug his heels into Ned's ribs, and galloped off behind the herd.

In the afternoon when Danny drove in the cattle, all went to meet him. It was cool out of doors; but they wanted to be free from the house which loneliness had pervaded. The children were conscious of its emptiness without Mom, who had been there always. Now a certain responsibility, owing to the unusualness of the day, was shared by all, down to baby Ellen.

"Let's do the chores. There's going to be a storm or something," Danny called against the brisk wind which had lately risen.

"It's too early," Sheila answered, as she shifted the heavy Ellen to her other hip. "What'll Pop say?"

"Well, I don't want to be out in no storm. I'm about frozen now." This from Danny, whose face was red with cold. "Let's do the other chores and then milk. Let's get extra hay in to burn. We must cover that pile of potatoes, too."

Sheila complied, and by the time they had finished milking it was snowing. The wind was blowing fiercely, tossing the snow madly about.

"Didn't I tell yuh?" Danny asked proudly, showing his permanent frontals which loomed large in line with his just-appearing bicuspids. "The geese and ducks knew it. Funny we can't tell better."

The children drank the warm milk and watched for Pop and Mom until sudden darkness covered the window pane. When the wind swooped around the house and drove the snow against the roof, Danny jumped from his chair.

"It's a regular blizzard," he announced like a veteran, "and the stock will be buried. I've tied Ned and I'm going to untie him and I'll turn the cattle loose."

They opened the door, and the wind swung it from their hands. They stood in a semi-circle, just inside. A duck and a drake quacked assuringly on the doorstep. The premature night was not black but white. Only at intervals could they see the barn and cowshed.

Danny put on his cap and an old coat and boots of Tim's.

"Ain't you afraid, Danny?" Sheila asked in alarm. "Mom wouldn't want you to go."

"I ain't afraid—much. You see, everything will be buried 'fore morning."

Still he hesitated on the sill. The wind chilled the house and tossed things about. The children drew back their semi-circle.

Suddenly Danny set his chin, bent his head, and stepped into the storm. The children waited. He returned in a short time.

"A knife, Sheila. I need a butcher knife. Ned's rope's so frozen I can't untie it." Again he disappeared and again returned.

"Pop and Mom ought to be comin'," he remarked. "They'll have a terrible trip."

"Oh, Pop won't get lost," Sheila comforted.

"But that wagon in the snow. . . . Snow's gettin' terrible deep, and driftin'."

At Danny's apparent alarm, the younger children cried with anxiety.

"Why don't you put them young ones to bed?" he asked.

They lighted the lamp, although they were low on kerosene. Danny fed the fire. Then all prayed in secret and aloud, Kitty Ann reiterating in tears: "Dod, bring Pop and Mom home from the bad storm, and don't let my new shoes get all snowy."

When there was apparent quiet in the bedroom adjoining, Danny looked up at Sheila, who was sitting with him beside the fire, and remarked convincingly: "I bet yuh Pop and Mom are dead."

"Why, Danny, Pop always comes home. Maybe they stopped at somebody's house."

"They wouldn't stop at no house."

There was a wail from the bedroom. Kitty Ann had overheard. "Oh, Danny said Pop and Mom are dead."

Sheila went to her. "They'll come during the night."

"O-oh. Mom and Pop'll come during the night."

" 'N bring me tandy?" Emmet was awake also.

"Yes."

"O-oh, *candy!*" in chorus.

"And shoes for all of us." This from Sheila.

"Shoes for me?"

"Yes."

"Sooz for me?"

"Yes,—go to sleep now."

"O-oh. Pop and Mom are coming home. Pop and Mom ain't dead at all."

"Go to bed, Danny," Sheila said as she re-entered the kitchen and saw him slouched dejectedly in the chair.

Danny was not thinking of rest. Knowing that his parents could not combat the storm, he was convinced that they were dead. And they had always returned before. He stood up, toyed a little with the lamp screw, and announced solemnly: "If they are dead I'll help you raise the children, Sheila." He then left the kitchen and took his place beside Emmet.

Sheila slept in the big bed, and rocked the cradle when Ellen began crying. The wind caught up the child's wail, repeated it, echoed it, and sent it moaning through the stovepipe. The roof sent down bass cracking chords. The little house, beating out the tempo, rocked in the hold of the wind. In momentary lulls they heard Ellen's difficult breathing. There was the tapping, tapping of a dangling clothes-line against the corner of the house. Its tattoo was melancholy, ominous. Sheila wrapped her feet in her petticoat, curled up and prayed. She prayed all her English prayers and then attempted the German prayers heard recently recited in concert at church.

Danny alone was awake when Ellen began to gasp for breath. Having slept near Ellen the eighteen months of her life, he recognized symptoms of croup. Jumping out of bed like a released spring, he groped to the cradle and grabbed up the child. Turning her over on her face, he ran his finger as gently as he could down her throat and produced vomiting. The relieved child cried raucously.

"Sheila! for God's sake get up and start the fire. Ellen has croup awful bad," he called. "Sheila. *Sheila!*"

Danny was in tears himself, his teeth chattering with cold and anxiety.

Sheila, her head entirely covered to shut out the noises of the storm, was hard to arouse. Finally Danny succeeded in waking her, and they lighted the lamp and built a fire. Danny drew a chair to the stove and wrapped a quilt about himself and Ellen, holding her to the warmth there. When the baby's breathing became normal and she slept again, his thoughts went to his parents, lost out there in that night of storm. The fears of the evening returned to him. They were dead or they would have come. He brushed away his tears with the back of his hand and sat up in his chair. He wouldn't be a baby—there were enough babies around. He would meet it like a man. And, as the wind continued to blow against the house, merciful sleep came to Danny and he bowed his head over Ellen's face.

While the young Connors slept, Tim and Nell spent a sleepless night in the crude hotel at Shelbourne. While Tim praised the horses for their sagacity in refusing to start out in the storm, Nell's lips moved inaudibly.

The next morning the Connor children woke to find themselves entirely submerged. It was morning and Mom and Pop had not come! Sheila now was ready to share Danny's opinion, and in her inexperienced way she wondered what would become of them all. The youngest shrieked as their bare feet came in contact with the snow which had found its way in through every crevice. Before the door was a large drift. The house had not been banked or prepared for winter.

Having breakfasted on milk and potatoes, they united their strength in opening the door. They were welcomed

by the two ducks, which were entirely cut off from the outside world by a huge drift as tall as the house. The sun was shining. The storm was over; but they were completely snowed in.

Danny made a successful exit from the window of the loft, shovelled a channel back close to the house, and reported no signs of the stock.

It was a memorable day in the lives of the Connor children. Food gave out. There was no milk for Ellen. Hay was brought in through the tunnel.

In the afternoon Danny ventured as far as the Schwartzes'. He returned with milk. Schwartzes had no flour and were waiting to get some from the Connors. Katto assured him that his parents were all right and would show up soon.

As the sun was sending its last red glow over the submerged prairie, Ned, foraging in a cornfield, suddenly pricked up his ears, turned his head and sent out a welcoming whinny. It was answered by Jack and Jule, ejecting huge funnels of steam from their nostrils. A white vehicle moved slowly, clumsily around the big drift and stopped before a mound from whose apex a peeping chimney emitted a wispish curl of gray smoke.

CHAPTER XI

SHEILA and Danny were very anxious to return to school for the winter term. Jerome Loutch was still employed as teacher—the director, Emil Webber, with whom he boarded, saw no reason for dismissing him. Any teacher is better than none at all, Nell reasoned, as she bundled up the children and sent them off.

The winter, which had set in so early, continued to hold sway. There was no respite. Fresh snow fell every few days, completely obliterating newly-made paths and roads. The snow changed the contour of the prairie, each storm adding new embellishments, ephemeral and fantastic. Instead of its usual regularity, the landscape was broken by ranges and valleys, peaks and low foothills, each with its vegetation of flutes and filigree. On top of the crusted mounds the children ran to school like pigmies.

The attendance was not large. The Schwartzes were there, Bennie Hurd, and a few others. The Low Germans who lived farther away had not ventured out. Excitement was at low ebb. Bennie had a book satchel of black walnuts which he had received from his former home in the East. He gave each pupil a few, but he was most generous with Sheila.

Snug in his copper toes, Danny displayed his two new slate pencils and, oblivious to the glances of envy cast him by Ditz Schwartz, opened his new reader and began to study with a will.

"You say I am a rogue? I say I am not a rogue."

The word *rogue*, a new word; what was it?

Danny made a trip to the teacher's desk, his boots squeaking rhythmically, with his finger under the word.

"Rŏg-u," pronounced Jerome Loutch.

Danny returned to his seat and earnestly repeated:

"You say I am a rog-u? I say I am not a rog-u."

What did that mean? He must ask Pop.

At noon Herman and Ditz Schwartz, who lived close by, ran home and soon returned with two young puppies. Vitchy, their mongrel, was caring for a family of eight, which was seven more than Schwartz would allow them to keep. The boys saw an opportunity for a good trade.

Ditz alluringly held out to Danny a black puppy with a white spot on his nose. "I trade him for one pencil."

The puppy looked up at Danny and raised one silky ear.

"I'll take 'um," Danny answered.

In another corner Herman was exchanging a brown puppy for the remainder of Bennie's black walnuts; and having secured the prized nuts immediately presented them to Sheila, much to the chagrin of his brother Schwartzes.

"Dumb," they hissed.

Herman flashed his beady eyes, made a grimace, and proceeded to draw Danny's puppy for him on his new slate.

"I'll call mine Captain," Danny whispered. "What's yours?"

"Oh, maybe—Shep," Bennie answered, secreting the dog in the satchel where he had carried the nuts.

At the last recess Herman Schwartz, after a turn in the air, re-entered the schoolroom and packed away his book.

"I go home," he announced laconically, "there's blizzard."

Thereupon all the children began bundling into wraps. Jerome Loutch likewise was winding a scarf about his neck.

A little fresh snow was falling, but the loose snow was being picked up and blown about by a brisk wind.

The Connors and Bennie struck out against the gale. As they went on, the storm became more furious; and at the point where they were to separate, the snow was blinding. The three paused for a moment, their backs temporarily to the gale.

A rift in the storm revealed Bennie, with his store overcoat buttoned tightly under his chin and the satchel containing the puppy swinging from his shoulder. His cheeks were red, his eyes watery.

"Think you can make it?" Danny asked. "Better come along with us. 'Tain't so far."

Bennie hesitated, kicking one foot against the other. "I'd like to go home and make him a little dog-house tonight," he answered.

The wind whipped away his words.

Something of the mother in Sheila prompted her to insist on his coming, but she said nothing.

"See yuh tomorrow," Danny called as they parted. The Connors continued west; Bennie turned off to the north.

Danny held his puppy inside his coat with one hand. With the other he clung to Sheila, at the same time stay-

ing a little in the rear so that he should be shielded somewhat from the wind.

The snow beat against their weather eyes, which they had left unwrapped; cold penetrated their clothing, their skin, and entered into the marrow of their bones.

Danny began to cry, his tears freezing immediately and blinding him. "I'm cold, Sheila. My feet. My hands. Oh-h-h, I'm cold."

Sheila answered: "I'm cold, too, Danny: we're nearly home. Pray that God will help us." Her voice and Danny's piping cries mingled with the moaning wind.

"You pray, Sheila. I'm too cold."

Exhausted and chilled, they dragged on, but no object, no landmark came into sight.

Suddenly Sheila stopped. "Oh-h-h Danny, Danny," she cried, "we're lost! I don't know where we are. Help me, Danny. Show me the way, and I'll carry the puppy."

They bent close to each other, their voices mocking and unnatural.

Danny stepped from behind Sheila and lowered the scarf from his face. Sniffing the air like a hound, he swung his head around.

"We're not facing the wind. We gotta keep facing it."

Changing their course toward the blast, they stumbled on, falling, pulling each other out of drifts until Danny's face was pricked. His scarf was caught and held.

"Malget's fence!" There was no doubt of it, for there was not another rod of fence in the neighborhood.

"Gosh, we're out of our way," Danny said.

They concluded that by keeping to the right of the fence until they came to the corner post, and then by

going directly west again they would come to their grove if the wind had not changed meanwhile.

They advanced, Sheila keeping one hand on the fence in spite of constant jabs.

Exhausted and chilled, they would have preferred to lie down in the soft white snow and be warm. They thought of home at this time. Ellen in the high-chair, the stove, the odors of food, Mom, Pop. They were jerked from their musings by the corner post. They felt the bracings and recognized the turn.

They knew that now they must locate the west and strike out boldly. Still they clung to the post, as the only raft in that ocean of snow. A few times they ventured out only to return and cling there again. Finally Danny said: "I'm going," and holding to him, Sheila followed. They had not proceeded far before they heard a whistle.

"Pop's whistle," Danny shouted.

"The wind," Sheila answered.

A resounding whistle pierced the wall of snow.

"Pop's whistle," Danny reiterated. "Let's go toward it."

"Might be just something in the storm, and if we turn we'll get lost."

They stopped and listened.

The whistle came again, unmistakable, and they hurried toward it. Soon they were in Tim Connor's arms.

"Your mother has the old bell," Tim told them. "We must listen for it."

Soon it came, soft and alluring as the trickle of water. Tones—swelling, dying, strangled, only to be born again.

Sheila, leaning on Tim's arm, wondered about

Bennie. Bennie, bright and clean in boughten clothes, happily carrying off the soft brown puppy into the storm.

As Danny set down his own chilled dog before the fire he shared Sheila's misgivings. "I bet yuh Bennie never made it," he prophesied.

Next morning dawned calm and bright. Tim Connor was shoveling a path from his door when Mr. Hurd's cap appeared over a bank of snow.

"Our Bennie—here?"

"Bennie?"

Bennie had not made it.

By ten o'clock a searching party was organized, branching out in all directions. Tim returned late in the afternoon, his beard white with frost, icicles streaming from eyelashes and nose. To the children he gave an evasive answer; to his wife he said nothing.

Nell Connor looked at Danny, romping with his nuisance of a puppy, and offered a voiceless and sincere prayer of thanks. God was indeed good to them. God was good.

After the children were in bed, Tim went to the door. "Wind is picking up again," he muttered. "Wolves howling over west. I'll look over west tomorrow."

"I heard the wind all evening," Nell answered. "It's a requiem, that's what it is."

After many futile trips the search for Bennie was tentatively abandoned. Later snows effaced all clues and folded the victim the more securely in an enveloping shroud.

"The childer can stop at home the rest of the winter,"

Tim suggested to his wife. "Not much use sending 'em. Danny may develop into a 'rog-u', who knows?"

"They'd better stay out of the cold, in the name of God," Nell agreed.

Just one day Sheila returned, to bring home their books.

It was a lonely day. Few children were at school. At unprecedented intervals Jerome Loutch ate prodigiously of his bread and drippings. The Schwartzes quarrelled over their lunch, each striving to get the lower slice of bread, which was the more soaked with molasses. Herman was not there. Bennie's desk was empty. Sheila did not apply herself to study, but looked instead out of the window at the white waste of snow. There was no life —only the fluttering of snowbirds against the pane. The sun was making its circuit just the same as when Bennie was alive. In the forenoon it fell across her desk, reached as far as the stove, touched it, and then drew back. In the afternoon it appeared again, peeping in at the west window, stretching long fingers of yellow light across Bennie's desk and receding again.

Finally school was out. Sheila hurried home. There would be news. Perhaps Bennie was found and alive! She searched Nell's face. No one said anything, and Sheila as usual asked no questions.

CHAPTER XII

BEFORE Thanksgiving Day had arrived, winter had seemed interminable. Fresh snow falling every few days dispelled all hopes of deliverance. Settlers were in truth snowed in.

The Connors had saved all of their cattle and hogs—thanks to Danny's forethought in allowing them to roam at large; but feed was a serious problem. When the weather permitted, Tim and Danny went to the fields, shovelled off snow and snapped corn, which they carried home in sacks for the stock. They had fortunately packed their seed corn away in the loft room before the season's first snow. They had also saved their potato crop and some vegetables.

In the house, submerged as completely as a badger mound, Nell, amidst the prattling of six children and the yelping of a puppy, tried to carry on a systematic course of study. At the cost of effort she attempted to create a congenial atmosphere within the four small walls, but that was not so easily maintained. There were six children there, and a puppy, and a cactus.

The cactus, a mysterious thing that bloomed once every hundred years, obstinately held a place by the kitchen window. Nell had a veneration for the cactus, the only plant brought out from Massachusetts which had withstood the vicissitudes of climate, poultry and what not to which treasured fern and geranium had so soon fallen prey. In the world of snow its green, spiny

tongues were mute reminders that somewhere there was a vegetation.

To Danny the cactus was a source of diversion.

"One, two, three. Let's all touch it. You're afraid."

Kitty Ann's ill-aimed action ended in a wail. Blood issued from Margaret's palm.

"Danny, Danny, I declare if you don't let those children and that cactus alone—"

Danny, grinning, his large permanent frontals giving his mouth a looseness, his ears slightly lapped protruding between locks of unshorn hair, edged over near little Emmet.

"Look up here," he whispered, pointing to *The Trial of Robert Emmet*. "There's you. They're going to kill you. And there's your girl. Oh, Emmet has a girl!"

"Never mind," Nell comforted Emmet, who ran to her in tears. "When you grow up you can be a great orator like Emmet and you can go to school at Cambridge."

"I thought you said *I* was going to school at Cambridge," Danny interposed.

"If you don't stop tormenting those children you won't go anywhere."

Danny oscillated toward the cactus again. "Margaret, do you know what these spines really are? They're little green devils in there, and each one has a nail in the end of its tail."

"Dear me, Danny, where on earth do you get such ideas?"

"Out of my head."

In spite of resolutions, Nell's patience often failed and she had to be reminded to "wear her nice face."

When the open door disclosed the sweep of desolation about them, she found it necessary at times to leave the clamor of the kitchen and go to the bedroom.

Occasionally in the evening, slipping her feet into Tim's boots, she walked out on the cleared path and allowed herself the luxury of being alone. She looked wonderingly about at the immaculate earth, the clear stars and the unperturbed moon. The big dipper shone down as it used to shine through the branches of the elms in the Bay State. God who was now caring for them in the East—Aunt Mary, the old streets, the hills, the river—would care for them here in the West white with snow. God was in His Heaven; all must be right with His world.

Somewhat strengthened, she would re-enter her hut —white but for the door—and Tim, much to the amusement of the children, would usually greet her with:

"Good evenin', Mrs. Badger. Making a call? Me badgers are all well. How are yours? I think Danny Badger'll be after going head first into a snowdrift if he don't stop his monkeyshines around here."

They had almost no company. People were afraid to venture far from home. The wife of Max tramped through the snow one day and complained to Nell at length on the injustice of her lot.

"We got money, yes; but we can no laugh at our house. Max, he takes my money. He will not say why he saves it. I want a new shawl. He will not give me money. You see, he must do the business. I can no read, Mrs. Connor, I can no read."

"Begin right now," Nell suggested. "You're never too old to learn."

"Oh, now I am too old. And Max say all time I have no brains."

"I'd show him what brains I had," Nell said, aroused. "Bring your book here, Margaret. We'll begin right now."

And the wife of Max began her instructions in reading.

"I will get me such a book," she said enthusiastically, tears streaming down her furrowed face.

"Yes, and come over and I'll help you, but don't lisp it to a soul until you can rattle it off," Nell advised, smiling.

"You are wonderful woman, Mrs. Connor," the wife of Max said, and trotted off again through the snow.

In mid-winter, as the weather grew bitterly cold, Tim and Nell without admitting it to each other were ever conscious of the fact that the two haystacks in the yard —their only source of fuel—were steadily being reduced. The thought of their diminishing food supply haunted them, too, as the gaunt grey wolves that howled about at night. They knew that they would always have game, but it seemed disloyal to eat the lean, dazed prairie chickens that found shelter close to the stalks of corn.

The young Connors, however, were apparently unaware of conditions. They soon fell in with the new order of things: two meals a day and more time to sleep. They enjoyed their isolation; it meant the closest of contact with not only Mom but Pop.

Tim usually took charge of the group in mid-afternoon, at which time their evening began. They antici-

pated this time of the day—Tim sang then. Nell's sweet untrained soprano had often filled the house, singing lullabies and hymns; but lately when she sang tears rolled down her face. Tim's singing had a different tempo. His tenor had in it a ringing quality, a reality which carried visions of far-away places. And his reading of poetry was so intoned that the children could not clearly distinguish song from recitation. Books were inadequate and dull compared to the inexhaustible knowledge possessed by Tim, who had not only a new story but an elaboration of the old favorite for each evening.

On fair days after he had finished choring, doing the milking, and giving a meagre handful of oats or a few ears of corn to the stock, Tim often walked around the big drift in the yard and gained the clearing to the south. Then, looking over the soft white sheet of snow to the east where the gray sky closed down on his deserted world, he wondered what was going on back East. He thought of kinsmen; his brother John; Nell's folks; friends; old Judge De Wayne . . . oh, what would he give to see one of them for just five minutes! He tried to imagine what they were doing, and what was occupying the minds of politicians while he struggled here for mere existence. How quiet that prairie was! Only a slight click from the frozen twigs of the cottonwood broke the stillness. The wind seemed to be resting, regenerating its forces, waiting only for the stimulus of fresh snow, when it would again rage mercilessly; and after lashing him to shelter would howl and moan while it pelted snow against the dwelling and forced it in through every crevice.

Usually as Tim, leaving off his reveries, turned the knob of his door and stamped his feet loudly, his eyes twinkled to hear the sudden flurry inside.

"Me bootjack!" he would yell.

The flurry would increase to a general havoc as children hunted here and there. One evening as he entered, Kitty Ann walked up roguishly, produced the bootjack, and placed it in position before him.

It was the custom that whichever child presented the bootjack would have first choice in the selecting of songs. Accordingly Kitty Ann shouted:

"Fol de diddle di do."

Danny and Margaret demurred. Kitty Ann had been getting her choice often of late.

Sheila, standing in the background, said nothing.

"What is your choice, Sheila?" Tim asked, jerking at his frozen boots.

"Oh, any one," she answered. Sheila was growing taller and more slender. Her face, unlike those of the Connors, had not lost its summer tan, and in the dim light of the afternoon her dark eyes were large and penetrating.

"Now, children," Nell spoke up, "hear how Sheila talks. Sheila doesn't make a fuss; she's a little lady."

Tim looked at his wife, wondering if she knew that Sheila's apparent good manners were prompted by indifference. He felt chagrined at her apathy.

"The Croppy Boy, I want," Danny shouted.

Margaret stepped up before Tim, her flat little bosom covered with faded, flowered calico ripped from a comforter, her limpid blue eyes filled with tears. "Pop," she said, "Kitty Ann always hides the bootjack so we can't

find it for you. And today I found it under Mom's bed and she hit me with it when I took it. See?" She pushed back her brown hair and disclosed a florid temple.

Tim placed his boots beside the stove and padded about in his stocking feet. "You're a holy terror, Kit," he said, mustering all fierceness possible. "They'll be no passing of you when you grow up. Now for hurting Margaret, she'll be the one to get first choice. What'll it be, Margaret?"

When he drew up his chair Margaret rubbed her head against his shoulder. She looked quaint in her flowered, full-skirted dress.

"I want 'When lilacs last in the doorway bloomed' . . ." she said. "I don't want you to tune it; I want you to sing it."

"Did you ever hear the like of that for a request?" Tim asked his wife.

Nell, pouring milk into the bowls of mush on the table, answered: "She means, I think, that she wants you to recite it."

After grace the Connor flock was busy with mush and milk. The puppy yelped to Danny, who surreptitiously poured him a share, and Ellen in the high-chair clamored for continual tastes.

Kitty Ann managed a pout with difficulty at any time; and now her attempt to retain protruding lips while disposing of mush and milk was a sight not to be overlooked when novelties were so very rare.

Accordingly, Tim began in feigned alarm: "Mom, look at Kit's mouth. What do you make of it? I declare, it looks like the snout of a young badger."

Kitty Ann fled to the bedroom in tears.

Nell, noting the unfinished supper, said disapprovingly: "That bootjack game'll have to stop. They could take turns getting it. They nearly drove me crazy with it all day."

Supper over, the stove was filled with hay, the drafts emitting the necessary light. Tim called to Danny, nodded at Kitty Ann's bowl and motioned toward the bedroom. Danny carried in the unfinished mush, and Kitty Ann soon reappeared.

"I guess I'll play me flute tonight," Tim said diplomatically, and the children gathered around him.

They heard *Annie Laurie* and *Home to Our Mountains.*

Tim told again of his boyhood home in Ireland: the gathering of peat from bogs—"I wish to God we had it for fuel here"—and the collecting of seaweed to fertilize the potato patch. There were fairies, too, both good and bad, and the banshees whose warm breath meant instant death for anyone, regardless of how good a life he had led.

"Our national schools were where you'd get the floggings," he went on. "There were no Jerome Loutches there. A larger boy held the victim on his back while the teacher did the whaling." There was quiet in the kitchen as Tim spoke; at intervals hay snapped in the stove. "They flogged you for being late for school; they flogged you for little misdemeanors; they flogged you when you memorized imperfectly. I tell you it was a hard lot for the dull boy."

"Were *you* dull, Pop?"

"No, thank God. I could give it to them word for word."

Tim told his avid listeners of boyhood life at Dublin, chuckling reminiscently over pranks.

In tales of New England life, Nell joined. They recalled Fair Day and Cattle Show, spoke of steam cars, woods. . . .

"Woods! What's woods?" Kitty Ann or Robert Emmet would ask.

"Patches of trees that grow," Tim explained, "without being set out and watered. They have big shady leaves, and there's fruit, too."

"With apples and everything hanging on 'em," Margaret supplemented.

Danny, from his position on the floor, lying on his back with his feet extending up on the wall, said half to himself: "Gosh, I'm going back there when I'm big and eat and eat and eat."

"Are they bigger'n this house?" Kitty Ann asked incredulously.

And Tim, bestowing on Kitty Ann an extra caress by way of reconciliation, told of oaks whose circumference he could not span with his two arms, of other trees that tossed down nuts, of rows of shady elms, and of birches on whose branches children swung.

They listened attentively to Tim's recitation of poetry and interpreted it the best way that they could.

Robert Emmet's sleepiness was no signal of time; but when Margaret and Kitty Ann rested heavy heads on Tim's chest the end-of-the-day ritual of marking off the calendar took place. Another day was gone. All who could articulate repeated with Tim a verse that in some intangible way meant that so far all was well.

"So goes the day, far, far away,—"

. . . . . .

When March 16 arrived, Tim remarked: "It'll soon be spring; tomorrow will be Patrick's Day."

This was a suggestion to relate both fact and legend of the saint so beloved by the Irish.

"Do you know what I'd like?" Danny said by way of comment. "I'd like to be a saint for a while just to see how it would feel."

"It's a clout that you'd be deservin' after the winter, instead of canonization, me lad," Tim answered jocularly.

"Oh, Tim, you must be careful, joking about such things. They'll be confused. And the way you spoke about St. Patrick one would think that there was not another saint on the calendar." Nell was serious.

Tim sat erect. "Is there another to beat him? Why don't you tell them about some of the saints of New England if they have any since *you* left? How do you know? Maybe we have the makings of a prairie saint among us."

"It's not only this, but everything. They don't know of so many things. Sitting here listening it seems to me that the Irish and that indecent Whitman are the only people who ever wrote anything. Dear, dear, what will these children ever amount to? They've never heard of Longfellow."

"Yes we have, Mom," Margaret shouted, eager to prevent discord between Mom and Pop. " 'Week in, week out, from morn till night, you can hear his bellows blow. . . .' "

Nell had put on her shawl and was pulling on Tim's boots.

Tim could scarcely refrain from smiling as Danny,

jumping from the floor, unknowingly capped the climax with:

" 'Ireland will be free from the center to the sea.
Hurrah for liberty, said the *Shan Von Voch.*' "

Nell stepped out into the night.

"Off to bed now," Tim announced, "all of ye. I guess we played your mother out. Help 'em in, Sheila," as the children moved off.

Sheila obeyed silently, as usual. Again Tim caught a depth of mystery in the girl's deep, dark eyes. She was an obedient girl, a generous girl, but she lacked the restless energy of his children. Or was her restlessness subdued as her speech and emotions were subdued? Time alone could tell.

He opened the door and saw a dark figure standing in the white tunnel. Poor Nell! She's proud, the darlin'. The childer'll grow up all right if we can feed 'em. Wonder if she knows how low the hay is! He called dramatically:

" 'You are thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain time to walk the night;
And for the day, confined to fast in fires. . . .' "

And, in a natural tone: "Come along in out of that. You'll get your death."

The figure moved toward the house.

Tim said casually: "Blamed if that wind ain't picking up again."

There was no answer; Nell's face was averted.

Tim swung her around and held her by the arms. "Nell," he pleaded, "bear with me during this siege, and

next summer if the sun shines again and the birds sing you can play the devil with me. I'm doing my best for 'em, Nell."

"I know you are, Tim."

Although St. Patrick's Day came and went, winter preëmptorily held sway. The last of the hay was burned; and again Tim shovelled snow from the cornfields, the only remaining source of fuel. The Connors took sick, Sheila first and Kitty Ann worst of all. Tim made a perilous trip for medicine and on his return became a victim to the epidemic. During his illness, Danny carried down the seed corn from the loft and used it as fuel.

Kitty Ann's delirium reflected the salient points of anxiety of the winter, although Nell and Tim thought they had succeeded in keeping the children in ignorance of true conditions. The sick child fretted: "Bluey has no oats. Bennie is dead—out in the snow." She cried for the boot-jack; she raved of apple trees and swinging birch. Her eyes were glassy, her cheeks flushed; only the yellow curls seemed like Kitty Ann.

One day she recognized her father. "Pop," she said, "hold me."

And Tim, with Kitty Ann's thin body in his arms, bowed his head in thanks; the seed corn seemed a very trifling thing indeed. In a strained voice he sang her favorite song:

"Fol de diddle di do. Fol de diddle de-e."

CHAPTER XIII

WITH Kitty Ann's recovery came signs of spring. The sun shone intensely. The snow which had been strangling the prairie was forced to release one foothold after another, to give up, to disappear. Followed the trickle of running water. Water was everywhere—on roofs, on window panes, filling the yard, flooding the fields and swelling the sloughs. Prairie cocks proudly displayed their plumage and waltzed about on sunny uplands. Meadow larks were rampant. How welcome was their song! Flitting from dried weed to grass, they proclaimed the vital moment of life was now and the past winter a bad dream. "Come on," they chided. "Plant your crops and sing and hope; skies are blue and God is good."

People crept out from their shelters, shook off their winter coma, and heeded the call of the meadow larks. "We are coming," they answered with quickening pulse. "Only wait until we get seed. Seed! We're coming! We're alive! It is spring and we're alive!"

Tim Connor went to the cornfield and husked the remaining crop of corn, but it was sour and soft. It was of no use as fuel, nor was it palatable to the stock. He crushed the ill-fated stalks with a vengeance and sowed grain.

Neighbors greeted each other as strangers from afar; they ignored their recent bitter experiences and spoke of future plans. All were going to break a little more land. Old Buck and Spec, Tim's yoke of oxen, which

had foraged during the cold weather, were put to the plow once more. Nell was going to raise turkeys. She planned on trading some duck eggs with Katto Schwartz, who had been having good luck with turkeys.

Much as they hoped to forget the winter, there were constant reminders. One day Vitchy, the old mongrel, carried a shoe into the Schwartzes' yard. On examining the shoe they found a foot inside. Vitchy led them across the field to where Bennie Hurd lay. Inside his overcoat was the skeleton of a puppy. Bennie had removed the puppy from his satchel to a warmer repository.

While birds flew overhead caroling their nesting songs and a raw wind blew, Bennie, a guest on the prairie, the boy with the boughten clothes, who had left his parents and brothers and sisters in the East and had come West to break the silence in his aunt's heart and home, was placed beside Sheila's mother. There was a baby there now, too, who had arrived during the winter and found the world too cold.

Katto Schwartz, greatly moved by Mrs. Hurd's grief, gave vent to her own feelings by expressing her opinion of Jerome Loutch. Her raucous tones jarred in the hush that followed the services. "That dumb Loutch," she began; "if my Herman didn't smell blizzard coming that day, all the children—mine and Connors' and all—would be lost. That dumb teacher is big enough to know something once, but he don't know nothin'."

The crowd nodded in agreement.

"I'm going right over and see Webber," Nell spoke out. "Katto, I think you're right. I can't help but

blame him for turning the children out in the storm with all that loose snow."

Dutch Fred, the neighborhood bachelor, stepped up to the semicircle of women. The wind tossed his long beard about, commingling it with the shaggy fur on his buffalo coat. He raised his head, disclosing the clear gray eyes that shone below his bushy eyebrows. "In our distric'," he began, "we got just a young girl for teacher. She keep the children in the school all night. I look for them children," he nodded repeatedly for emphasis, "and I don't see them come. I know they be in school and I think I will cook something for them. I make pancakes, a dishpanful, and set them in the oven. I watch the storm. At eleven hour it gets clear. I wrap a quilt around that pan and take it to the children." He smiled reminiscently. "Oh, they were hungry like the little wolves. They were cold, too. I get coal and fix the fire and I see the storm getting bad again. I want to go home. Them little ones they have my quilt and my coat around them. They don't want me to take my coat. They don't want me to go. I stay there and keep the fire till the morning. And then that little teacher she telled me she was so glad I come. She made so brave, so brave, but I guess she was scared all right."

Only a few had heard about Dutch Fred's thoughtfulness on that memorable night; but from past experience they knew him to be a real neighbor. There was a silence following his narration. There was no need for words. The sun, sinking lower, was withdrawing the warm rays that had offset the raw, damp breeze. Men buttoned up their coats and women drew their shawls

about them. With one accord they climbed into their wagons.

"Drive me straight to the director's, right now, Tim," Nell commanded. "We'll tell Webber to hire that girl that applied for the school last week. We'll insist on it. A girl will have some manners and some heart and, let's hope, a little knowledge. That Loutch is a big—I-don't-know-what."

"He's a 'rog-u'," Tim said with a chuckle, "teaching on a permit at that."

"A permit! I thought Loutch said he had a certificate."

"He said 'certiffy,' Nell, but he really had a permit."

Webber was compelled to hire the Alice Inman in question, and Nell Connor sent four children off to school the first day of the spring term.

Kitty Ann led the group; Danny and Margaret followed; and Sheila, who was carrying a setting of duck eggs to Katto Schwartz, brought up the rear. Holding her basket as carefully as possible, she leaped over patches in the prairie where clear cold water oozed up in the green grass. Her step lagged as she walked on. On all sides was the caroling and calling of birds—lark to lark, bobolink to bobolink. So free. So free. Why must she go to school? She would prefer to stay at home and herd the cattle. But Mom . . . Well . . . Why? Why? There was a gentle pressure, a comfort, in the vitalizing air as it touched her. Her sturdy body, hardly adjusted to the newly acquired curves of adolescence, responded and swung in unison with the spring breeze. Her deep, dark eyes were alight with the visions which life held

before her. With face aglow she walked with spring and she *was* spring.

The younger children waited for her in Schwartzes' yard, where a fractious colt was galloping at large. On seeing the children, Schwartz gathered them into the safety of the house.

Nick, the oldest boy, was standing in the kitchen wiping blood from his mouth. Sheila gave Katto the basket of eggs and observed some unusual-looking objects in her hand.

"It's Nick's teeth—got kicked out," Katto explained; and after holding the unsightly teeth toward the children for a view she tossed them carelessly on a nearby shelf. Lightly: "He can keep them and put them in once when he goes to see his girl." Without further concern she began counting the eggs.

When the Connors left the house, the Schwartz boys were standing in a row in the yard, watching the antics of the disappearing colt. Herman left the group and walked up to them.

"Ain't you coming to school?" Danny asked.

"No, only Matt and Yak go. I herd cattle." He went up close to Sheila. "You tell your mother I watch Connors' cattle on my side of the field. Don't tell them," he said, nodding toward his brothers.

"All right," Sheila answered, knowing that Herman's act of kindness was not prompted through consideration for Mom Connor. Quite terrified at her own kindly feeling for Herman, she hastened on to the school. During the day she looked longingly out to where the sun was shining on her herding grounds. To be free from books—her pulse quickened as she thought of the kind look in Herman's eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the summer the same expanse of prairie which had so recently opened its arms to the snow and had bared its face to the wind, just so generously nurtured its growth of grain and grass; the wind which had so ruthlessly lashed the area unprotected by trees and hills, serenely now rocked bunches of flowers; and the sky, which lately had shut off the living world, was now blue, enhancing the charm and beauty of a prairie in summer.

"I feel young again," Tim announced one day as he stood outside the door after his noonday meal. "I don't blame the childer to run off with the last bite in their mouths."

Nell joined him in the doorway.

Before them a pair of hawks, like trailing black ribbons tinged with a glow from the sun, rose from the misty horizon, sailed high, careened and disappeared.

"This country, me girl, is like Schwartzes' colt. It's high-spirited like all young things and must be broken, conquered. . . . It may take more than a few front teeth; but I wouldn't be back East today, Nell, for all the comforts in the world."

"But the winters," Nell broke in.

"Winter won't be so bad again. That was just a tantrum, a vagary. Mark me words. This country will soon keep step with the rest of the world and develop into a law-abiding citizen."

"If it just would, Tim."

"It will, Nell."

In the fall, after the settlers had harvested a good crop and had paid the most exigent of bills, they sent glowing accounts of the country to friends and relatives. The Connors sent cheerful letters East, but the mail from there showed many changes. The academy that Nell had attended in Northampton was a college now, Smith College. Her uncle Henry had died, cousin Ellen was married, and aunt Mary was alone. Ellen's husband was a consumptive, and the doctor had advised them to go West. They asked: "Should we come?"

"Bully, bully for them!" Tim ejaculated. "Sure and they can come."

"Oh, I'd love to see cousin Ellen and have her close by," Nell said, with tears in her eyes.

After their first enthusiasm Nell looked at Tim, and Tim looked at Nell.

"I don't know," she said. "Ellen's not strong. He with consumption. . . . Can they stand things the way we do? I'd feel responsible . . . the winters."

"I know . . . the winters."

Nell put down the letter. "Let's leave them where they are, in the name of God."

The year's grist was hauled to a new mill. The Hollanders had erected a genuine Dutch mill with a large cumbersome wheel which was propelled by the fancy of the wind. It not only served as a convenience to the community, but proved to be a curiosity as well.

Max, who prided himself a model of haste, was the first in his neighborhood to take a grist to the Dutch mill. He called at Connors' enroute home, with no flour.

Max was vexed indeed. He had willed the wheel to turn and it had not heeded. That was a most unusual experience for Max.

Tim chuckled as Max told of the day. Wagons were lined up by the dozens with their grist. There were representatives present of many tongues and creeds, and they cursed and prayed in turn in as many tongues and creeds. "I go there no more," Max said disgustedly. "I go farther but I go where I will get my flour."

As he turned to leave, Tim called: "I'm going over tomorrow, Max, and try it with a few in Irish. I'll send you over some flour tomorrow night."

"Huh," Max answered, as he swung his team around.

Sheila accompanied Tim on his trip to the mill. Danny had been planning all summer on going and had conjured many images of the wonderful mill, but Sheila was more capable to do the required trading, so Danny was left at home. The wind on this day was not capricious, and Tim Connor received his flour. In the evening, more through deviltry than benevolence, he sent Danny over to Max's with a bag of flour.

Danny, galloping away on old Ned's back, accepted the errand as a retribution. Max's place was a curiosity —anything might happen there. He wondered what Max would say when he knew that Pop got flour.

Max was not at home, and the wife of Max said that she was very grateful that he was not.

"No, I can't take the flour anyhow," she explained to Danny. "Max he would get mad if he knew that Tim got flour. No, no," and she returned the sack to the boy. "But come in the house once. I am so glad one from Connors come. I will not ask my gels. Come." She led

the bewildered Danny to the bedroom, where she unearthed a book, a Second Reader, from under her straw tick. "Help me once," she said and opened the book. "See, here. Read this once."

Danny read:

" 'I built me a nest in the old beech tree,
As cozy a nest as ever could be.
I wove it with threads to the beech tree bough,
And three little birdies are sleeping there now.' "

" 'Beesh,' " the woman repeated. " 'Bough,'—Why for is *beesh* in this book?"

"A *kind* of tree," Danny answered, quite moved by the earnestness of the woman. "Bough is *part* of a tree. The bird built its nest in the bough of the beech tree."

"Oh, thank you," the woman said, smiling. She pressed a nickel into his palm. "Don't let Max or my gels know I give you this."

As Danny galloped home with his flour and the nickel, there was a quizzical expression on his freckled face.

CHAPTER XV

NEXT spring before the frost was out of the ground, prairie schooners again appeared on the trail. In their snail-like pace across the country, their canvas covers had a barely perceptible movement . . . sailboats leisurely holding their course to the west. The settlers always saluted the driver and if there was a wife beside him on the seat added the customary: "Hooray, the woman!" Children often peered from beneath the canvas cover, but rarely did one see old people in these family groups. It was a young country, for young people. One little mover lad whose family had spent the night in the Connors' yard expressed this quite thoroughly by saying: "We left usses grandma and grandpa, but we didn't leave usses selves."

Previous to this time, many sections of land owned by the Government, the Railroads, and eastern speculators lay unbroken and were used by the settlers as herding grounds. Much of this land was now thrown open. In consequence, agents raced about day and night; Tim Connor, too, spent many an hour in aiding newcomers to locate.

One day he noticed a team and rig on the one hundred and sixty acres adjoining his on the south. He sauntered over.

"Lost your chance, Tim," Barnes, the land agent, spoke as he brought his team to a stop and untied the colored rag by which he had been counting revolutions

of the wheel. "You fellows here should be buying this up. Plenty left yet. In the market for any?"

Tim shook his head. "Tell you the truth, Barnes, most of us got more now than we can pay for. Glad to have a close neighbor, though. Me wife will be, too."

"This is a young German, an aristocrat. Can talk seven languages, the description goes. Not here yet; but thought I'd measure him up as I was out this way."

"German," Tim repeated. "Is he High German, Low German, or just plain Dutch? Won't matter much if he's such a linguist."

"Don't know,—placed through an eastern agency." Barnes hammered the remaining stake into the ground and raised his body with difficulty. "There, guess that's close enough. You and him won't quarrel over it, will yuh?"

Tim laughed. "No, I guess not. This corner is too low to break, anyhow."

A few weeks later, when there was every evidence of a promising harvest, Tim Connor and Schwartz went to town to order machinery. Tim needed a harvester, and Schwartz a corn plow. After transacting their business and being refreshed by a toddy and a glass of beer respectively, they were about to climb into their wagon when Barnes rushed from his office dragging with him a very confused young man.

"Hey! Gentlemen," he called. "Here's your neighbor, Johann Hoepner. Take him along out. Everything is fixed up. I'm striking off with a load up north. Dutch are piling in thicker than hops. Now is your chance,

gentleman, to buy up Iowa land. It will soon be going it at ten dollars an acre."

"Come on, me bye," Tim addressed the newcomer. "No wife?"

A fringe of color surged over his pale face. "No, not yet," he answered seriously.

"He is promised," Schwartz concluded.

"Well, bully for him," Connor said. "Let's be starting." And the settlers helped the boy with his numerous boxes and satchels into the rear of the wagon. They themselves occupied the seat.

Johann, his yellow hair curled up under a heavy felt hat, his grey eyes luminous, flashing, stood erectly in the wagon and viewed his domain in the new country. He smiled complacently. Never since he had left Germany two months before, had he felt so complete an escape. An escape not only from military duty, but an escape from all the restrictions of an old life in an old land. For such as he the prairie had waited; he was sure of that. Distinct from the carol of its birds, he caught a lilting, tuneful song—the voice of the prairie itself—calling in its glamour and strength to the youth in him. The prairie reached up to him; he saw it, he felt it. He was conscious of the feel of a plow in his hands. He tried to visualize these treeless stretches about him yellow with grain. "Oh!" he exclaimed impulsively. "Mein Gott!"

At his ejaculation both men on the seat swung around. Connor, sensing the boy's delight, remarked: "Pretty fine stretch of country, isn't it, me lad?"

Schwartz shrugged, looked appraisingly at the boy,

and alone was cynical. Perhaps Schwartz had adequate reason to be so. Here was a dandy coming, with hands like a baby's. And this year was not going to be a good year, according to his wife's predictions. All spring, as Katto planted and tended the crop, she had prophesied that "the devil," if nothing worse, would take this harvest. And Schwartz was justified in not being incredulous of his wife's statements. A scar on his forehead was a tangible proof not only of her infallibility but also of her strength. So if she deemed it expedient to put in the crop and to predict thereon, it was his part to care for the house and family and not to contradict. However, imbibing some of Tim's geniality, he spoke to the enraptured newcomer in German and pointed off across a slough toward a proposed town.

Then the men were silent again. The long miles between habitations fascinated Johann. He planned to get rich quickly and to send for Emma. He and Emma alone out here with the sky and flowers—flowers that waited for the touch of children's hands. Why, in Germany people got rich on small acreages. And here . . .

Schwartz, with jerks of his crooked thumb and with voluble flow of German, indicated to Johann the Schwartz home, Tim Connor's, and the location of Johann's land. Then after an exchange of confidential jargon with Tim, he jumped from the wagon. His short, spare body reduced itself to a black line against the green, a dot on the horizon, disappeared.

"You'll be but a stone's throw from us, if we put up your soddy there on that swell of land," Tim announced to the newcomer. Johann hardly compre-

hended. He could but stare at the prairie which had been indicated as his.

Tim gallantly drew up the team before his own domain: a small house of unpainted boards squatting down on a patch tramped bare of grass, a granary likewise weathered, a thatched shed, a struggling truck patch, pigs wallowing in scrooped-out holes, a bleating red calf tied to the wheel of a plow. A woman was washing in the shade of the house, and around her was a flock of children playing in the piles of cool, black earth which the chickens had roughed up.

At sight of a stranger, the children scampered behind the house and peeped around a corner. The woman dried her hands on her apron and came to greet Johann.

Nell Connor was not a large woman. In height she reached only to Johann's shoulder; but there was a well-formed muscularity about her that convinced one of her endurance. Her arms were bare, and her stockingless feet were encased in old shoes. Johann knew that he was welcome when he saw her face: a small-featured face with round blue eyes and sensitive lips; a face that held in it no fear, yet no bravado; a face happy but yet a little sad. Johann swept off his hat and bowed low over her hand.

Nell noted the damp bandeau caused by the weight of his hat, encircling his curly head, his fair skin tinged with pink from its recent sunning, his gray eyes, his military figure, and his sound, even teeth. Lord save us! A mere boy, trustful and untried! Why had he chosen the *prairie?* She smiled at the newcomer. "We'll call you John," she said. "How will that be?"

The children soon emerged from their retreat and resumed their play. Nell emptied her wash tub and went into the house.

Johann sat on the wagon tongue and looked about him. The sun was setting, flooding the prairie with yellow light. A girl approached driving a few red cows. She was so much the color of the sunset, that one might expect her to disappear with its afterglow. Her hair, like spun gold bleached in places to the shade of wild honey, was floating about her shoulders, confined by neither pin nor ribbon. She was more a child than a woman. Her step was light and her body firm and graceful. Her face and feet were tanned brown as copper.

Johann sat entranced, but only for a moment. He soon dismissed the girl who walked out of the sunset as part of the prairie setting, and his thoughts reverted to Emma . . . his Emma, plump-cheeked and full-bosomed. . . . Emma, corseted so tightly that she puffed climbing the steps from the garden . . . Emma, daintily shod, making embroidery for her wedding clothes. His pulse quickened.

The girl, having turned the cattle into Tim's care, approached. Her manner toward Johann was shy.

"My daughter Sheila," Nell Connor called from the doorway.

Sheila raised her dark brown eyes and greeted Johann: "I hope you'll get along all right."

He bowed low. Though reticent, Johann felt that he had discovered a beautiful land and some very kind people.

Next morning Schwartz, not very agreeable, with his team and wagon, and Tim with his team and the breaking plow set about to erect a dwelling for the new settler.

"They're plowing up a house for the greenhorn," the young Connors sang out.

"Great way for you to be talking," Nell chided. "What if he should hear you?"

"Well, that's what Schwartz called him," Kitty Ann argued.

"Greenhorn, indeed! Why, he has studied seven languages. I wonder how he'll manage here. I'm glad he's so close. We can look after him a little. Poor boy."

Johann came to the prairie too late in the season to put in a large crop. His neighbors broke ten acres of land for him, however, and he planted corn by hand, chopping holes in the sod and covering it with his foot. In this occupation he had his initial experience with natural enemies. The pocket gophers watched him warily and on first occasion dug up the precious corn and carried it off in their pouches. Patiently he replanted, and then stationing himself nearby, shot as many of the invaders as possible.

"Advise him, Tim," Nell begged, "and don't let him use up all his ammunition on gophers. He'll be needing game this winter."

"Don't you be bothering me with that fellow. Ever since he set foot here you've been stewing about him. Let him work out his own salvation same as the rest of us. He has no one but himself to worry about."

"That's the part that worries me, Tim. He has no one. All alone like that. No one to talk to."

But Johann spoke to the corn, as he counted the stalks and propped up weak leaves.

"How many stalks today, John?" Danny delighted in calling out.

Seriously he made reply: "Seven and twenty; hundred; two hundred."

When Schwartz heard that Johann counted his stalks he said: "The greenhorn has it in the head."

The neighbors could not fully appreciate how Johann had staked his happiness and had sacrificed a fortune in coming to America. His success here would not only insure transportation and a home for Emma, but it would prove to his father and to hers that there were more desirable forms of livelihood than serving in the German army. As military life was extremely distasteful to him, he gloried in the freedom of the boundless prairie. Living here was almost worth the temporary separation from his loved one. For it would not be for long. In a year or two he must have a home established and transportation saved. And as he worked with his crop he was preoccupied with the thought that Emma was waiting to come to him.

He was grateful to Nell Connor for garden seeds. He also set out a few trees—small twigs scarcely discernible in the grass. Next spring he would get fruit trees and place them around his land as they did in Germany. He watched his neighbors, noted their industry, and imitated them.

His days were busy, working, planning; and his nights were full of dreams. The prairie in its vastness and mystery was conducive to dreaming.

Near his soddy was a "wallow" in which was a large stone around which many buffaloes had left their skeletons. At evening, Johann would light his pipe and sit on this stone, watching each moon—thin, steel crescents, round discs with smiling faces and squinty eyes, waning moons, and moons re-born. He speculated on the number of moons until harvest. About him night birds winged their swift flight through the dusk. And there was a sharp yelping of young wolves.

The prairie at night, a blue-domed sky with myriads of stars and a low-hung moon, brought the same reverential spirit that Johann experienced when he had stolen into a dusky alcove of the Cathedral of Cologne during vesper service. There were the high-vaulted ceiling, the myriads of flickering tapers, and the sanctuary lamp.

But Johann knew no prayer for these occasions. His father had no thought for prayer. Johann had, however, a feathery memory of prayer when he thought of his mother who had died when he was very young. He remembered an open window through which came the scent of the garden. There were prayers repeated, and the door was closed quietly. Bed covers soft as his mother's cheek. Safe. Secure. That was all. Occasionally, he found an expression in the faces of the mothers about him which was the incarnation of the face that came with his mist-like memories.

Such an expression was that of Nell Connor when she looked at him with concern and advised him to get out more. Nearly every day she sent some one of the family to see him. Danny came and the younger ones were a veritable nuisance. They questioned him about his guns, his clothes, his pictures. They foraged in his boxes and thumb-marked his books. Occasionally Nell Connor herself appeared with some treat. Sponge cake right out of the oven, cottage cheese—Johann was very fond of cottage cheese. But, being a youth, he resented her acts of kindness and her look of solicitude as reflections on his sense of independence.

One day Nell stopped at Johann's soddy enroute to the field with a lunch for Tim. She picked up Emma's picture—a tintype in a frame—carried it to the door, and looked at it intently.

Johann folded his arms and retreated into the shadow.

"Nice girl, John. She seems to have a good, innocent face. Father in the army, too?"

Johann nodded. "An officer."

"I see." Nell dusted the picture with a corner of her apron and placed it in its cornice. Then the look on her face: concern, motherly solicitude. Her blue eyes grew misty. "You mustn't stay home and think about her all the time, John. There's a nice family of young folks over at Steindlers'; have you met them yet? Come over Sunday and I'll have them over. Come to dinner."

"I will come Sunday," Johann answered, quite confused. "I don't know all what you say. I would like to know the English. Would you teach me once to read it better?"

"Of course I will, John; or, better still, I'll put Sheila at it and you can help her with Latin or perhaps French. That will be fine." Nell picked up her plate and paused just inside the doorway. "We'll be expecting you then Sunday, John."

Nell almost ran across the field with Tim's lunch. "Good luck is coming to us, Tim," she greeted him. There was a tinge of color in her cheeks; her eyes were bright. "Sheila has a chance now to learn something. John is going to teach her Latin and perhaps French in return for help in English."

Tim stopped his team and looked at his wife. Before answering he drew the back of his hand across his mouth and drank from the small brown jug in which she had brought fresh water. He recorked the jug and set it in the loose black earth.

"Can she learn it, Nell?" he ventured. "I, meself, think it a useless procedure. Let him teach her the German. She hears that so much it will be easier for her; and then if we get her ready to teach, it'll come in handy."

Tim sat on a plow handle and devoured the sponge cake. "Sheila'll do well to teach," he went on, "and it will take all our skill to get her that far."

"Tim," Nell leaned forward, her face alight with interest. "Do you know what I'd like to do for Sheila? I pray for it. Send her back East to school. And who knows, Tim, perhaps we can . . . and after Sheila the others."

"Sheila will do well if she teaches the young ones

around here. Her wages will be her own, and if she wants to go on, I for one would never thwart her plans; but I don't believe she's the kind you make her out, Nell. She's not ambitious. Can't you see it?"

"I'm not looking for flaws in her; and I'm glad she is different. She's gentle, and does as she's told."

"Yes," Tim broke in, "but did you ever have to tell her *not* to do anything, even a bit of mischief? She seems to have no fire or spirit. Tell me one thing. Can you name one thing she shows any interest in? She goes about taking things by the easy handle, with never a care or thought of the morrow. I believe she has no more responsibility than little Ellen, nor as much."

"I'm glad she doesn't, the poor child, with no kith or kin. I'm just glad she doesn't worry about things; and I thought you had a heart toward her, Tim."

"Nonsense, Nell, I have the same heart for her that I had when she came, a bit of a stray colleen; but it's you I'm thinking of, Nell. I don't want to see you disappointed."

"A lot you care about me and my disappointments. I suppose it will be Danny next that will get the going over." Nell swept away from the field, rage and anger taking possession of her. Tim's words were true enough. Sheila was rather listless; but wasn't it nice that she was, and not like the daughters of Max, who were in a stew over something all the time? And Sheila would learn. Nell would see to that. She would show Tim. She would begin with German and after that the Latin.

Tim watched after his wife for a moment and noticed the droop of her shoulders. Then he drew his

pipe from his pocket, untied a small sack of tobacco, filled and lighted his pipe, tossed the match at his feet and crushed it into the soft earth. Then, slipping the tied reins about his shoulders, he grasped the plow handles, spoke to Jack and Jule, bent over the plow, and began to make a darker furrow in the already black soil.

CHAPTER XVI

ON reaching the house Nell forgot her own recent provocation, for the wife of Max was there and in tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Connor," she broke out by the way of greeting, "I could cry when I see you and Tim in the field talking. Tim he is a kind man. Max he would not talk unless it was a preach he was giving. Max he would make a good preacher." She was smiling now and making light of her first emotion. "Oh, Mrs. Connor," she continued, "a letter came for me. I opened it. I knew it was for me. I saw the *'s'* this way after the *'Mr.'* It was a check from my brother, my share from the land. After I open it, I got a scare. I want to paste it shut again but I had tore it. So I went and say my prayers. I think: If I die then I will be ready. I take my little crucifix I got in mission in Dubuque and think there was Jesus suffering, too, and He did no wrong. Then I went out to my man and gave him the letter. I think if he kills me I had one thing: I could read all them little marks and know that my brother was sending money yet." The women leaned toward each other. Their faces almost touched. The wife of Max had a hand on Nell's arm. "Do you know that man got weak-like, so surprise was he when I read those little lines. He didn't strike me once. But oh, I so fear for you, Mrs. Connor. Max said: 'That's what she does, huh? I will fix that smart Mrs. Connor once. She won't be so proud. Some day I will.' So I warn you. I feel so for you."

Nell smiled. "I'm so glad you read the letter; but don't worry about me." She put the coffee pot on the stove. "We'll have some coffee and there is a heel of a loaf of cake here yet." She drew herself up before her guest. "Max can't frighten me. I guess I can't get frightened any more. I've seen enough. I had Indians here when there wasn't a house for miles. See the marks of prairie fire?" displaying her arms. "Alone I welcomed Kitty Ann into this prairie and cared for her. And storms and loneliness and hunger. . . ! Your Max can't frighten me. I'm ready for him or anyone else who will try to destroy our chance of making a decent living for our children." Max's wife looked at her reverently.

After the women had drawn up to the table, Nell, for custom's sake, inquired after Max's foot.

"Not good. He cannot walk much; but today he went to county seat, so," she added, smiling, "I come here."

As her guest expatiated on the discoloration of her husband's foot, Max's warning floated in on Nell's consciousness and out again. "I will fix that smart one once. She will not be so proud. Some day." How queer that was! What could he know? Oh, could it be Sheila? Certainly not.

Aloud she said: "Have the girls come over Sunday. I want John to meet them." And she cleared away their lunch dishes.

Max's wife was elated. "He'll take a wife," she said, her dull brown eyes animated. "He will be a good one for my Tilly or my Julie." The wrinkles of her face went into deeper furrows, and with her smile her narrow lips tightened over her large teeth. The news was so

stimulating that she could sit and converse no longer. "I will go now, and thank you," she said.

On the following Sunday afternoon four of the six daughters of Max—Mary, Julie, Katie and Tilly—arrayed in their own and borrowed finery, started on their way to walk to Connors', the marriage market; the greenhorn would be needing a wife. Without envy or malice, the two remaining daughters and the wife of Max watched them from the doorway and wished them all Godspeed, and one of them victory. The existent state of magnanimity of all was not attained without much quarreling and tears. All of them, even Annie, wanted to go; but they finally decided on four as they had suitable clothes for four only. It was understood that the four oldest would go by right of age; but the wife of Max saw no need of Lena going when Lou Hoppe, the hired man, was by all appearances making up to her.

Lena was for going. Lena was slight and willowy, with the brown eyes of her mother: hers, however, were bright and alive with the buoyancy of youth. Her hair was red like her father's and her body hard and muscular as a man's.

"We're not promised," she argued.

"What did he say, then?" the mother asked.

Without pride or shyness, Lena answered frankly: "He said that he couldn't plow for watching me in the field."

So, he was watching across at Lena, then, when Mary was his plowing partner! Mary, the oldest, who almost had a match in Dyersville had they not moved away before the romance had come to a climax.

The wife of Max called Lena aside. "I see it that Lou likes you all right. Come. Stay home now. Think once on Mary; the oldest should go first. Katie and Tilly can go, and let Julie go in your place. Think once on Julie, too, so thick and with such big freckles on her face, like Max."

Lena acquiesced.

The four fortunate girls, though rivals, did not look upon each other as such. With feet and bodies crammed into tight clothing, their faces flushed and expectant, they raised their skirts from the grass, bent their bodies against the ever-blowing breeze, and felt that all could be victorious. The May day, the sense of freedom from work, the sky, the prairie, the pulse and hopes of youth tinged their shadows of doubt. All could win.

As the wife of Max saw them grow smaller and smaller, she reasoned: Johann might want a red thick one, a red thin one, a black thick one, or a black thin one. She could have done no more; she had sent one of each.

Meanwhile the girls were going on toward adventure, going dreamily now, their thoughts soaring and carrying them off to high places. This experience in itself was a luxury, for in their usual day they had no time or energy for dreaming. In the field, if they were not intent on their work, the plow would slip; and in the evening their straw ticks crinkled so restfully that with only a glance at the stars they fell asleep.

Max, who had been over south looking at his corn, swung around and was now before the girls, hobbling along using a stick for a cane. His powerful figure was foreboding as it expanded before them.

"Ya, where are you going?" he asked.

The girls, guilty as criminals, abashed and fearful, stood. Mary, the oldest, to whom they looked as spokesman, was absorbed in brushing seeds from her skirt.

Katie, "the black thin one," more independent than the others, perhaps because she was meeting Pete Schwartz away from home occasionally, spoke up:

"To Connors'. Mrs. Connor say we shall."

"Where is Lena?"

"Home."

"Why?"

"She is tired from plowing. She shall rest."

With a flourish of his cane, Max indicated the direction of their house. "Go home."

The four marriageable girls turned as one and retraced their way. Katie rather indifferently, Mary and Tilly bitterly, and Julie in tears.

The wife of Max, so trained to silence, established a precedent by rising in defense of her action. In consequence, she was beaten terribly.

That night Tilly and Julie, with their heads under the covers, decided to run away to Sioux City on first opportunity. Katie crept away from the house when all were in bed and met Pete Schwartz on the prairie. Mary showed no reaction to the afternoon's proceedings, unless she was more silent and a harder worker than ever.

Nell had watched for the Steindler girls on Sunday while Sheila and Johann exchanged their knowledge of language. Once she thought she saw them coming across the field; but when they did not arrive, she knew that Max had detained them. So, keeping the children from annoying the two students, she noted their application.

While Sheila mechanically repeated the German words, her dark eyes left the book to rest quizzically on Johann's face; Johann, oblivious to any scrutiny, taught religiously.

After the spring term of school ended, Danny anticipated a summer of excitement. A well-digger was coming to dig a new well; a carpenter was going to build another room, a bedroom for Sheila; Danny was to move up and be the sole occupant of the loft-room, to have the protection of the old hatcher's wings and view the country through the old hen's eye; and—best of all—he was going to accompany his father when he went to town to bring home the harvester.

Vacation offered much to the younger Connors, too. Expeditions on the prairie usually brought discoveries. And there were Johann and his mysterious house close by. When the lonely neighbor had not visited with Connors for awhile, Nell sent the children to see him. "Clear off over and see John a while. He'll be dead with the lonesome." As Johann rested outside his shanty in the evening, the mob would bear down upon him. Kitty Ann delighted in grabbing his hat for a chase. Robert Emmet clamored to hold the large watch with the heavy fob bearing the Kaiser's image. Ellen, her light curls bobbing as she toddled about, prattled inarticulately, attempting to repeat the last phrases of the others by way of emphasis. Was there anyone who could ask as many questions as Danny? And at Margaret's imaginative tales, Johann knew that he appeared stupid and incredulous. He could not even feign a hearty response to the children who approached him in as many channels as there were children; he could only catch Kitty

Ann, rescue the hat and smooth it carefully to form, and sit silently. He never sent the children home, neither did he welcome them.

They bothered Johann no more after the well-digger, Ben, arrived. Next to Pop the well-digger was the most wonderful man in the world. Never after he had driven his bony nag into the yard was he a moment alone in his waking hours, nor did he wish to be.

The well could not be dug where Nell had wished it. She had hoped that it could be built near the house so that in time they could have a narrow walk built to it —that is, after they got the pigs and stock fenced in,— but after Ben had "witched" the ground with a willow crotch he announced that there was no water under the desired spot. It was several rods from the house that the willow turned the proper way to indicate a vein of water.

While Ben worked he talked incessantly. There seemed to be a memorable incident or a song for every day of his existence; and he found six eager minds and as many pairs of eyes ready to hold as true, fact and make-believe alike. Ben had led a varied life. He had been a cowboy on the plains, he had been in the Civil War, he had worked on the railroad, he had built houses and he had dug wells.

Ben was the first baldheaded man that the young Connors had ever seen. Accordingly, they must find out at intervals what was the matter with his head.

"That's where I was scalped by an Indian," he repeated. "You see they thought that I was dead, so they just took off the scalp-lock and left me. The skin growed

together nice and smooth and here I am, digging your Poppy a well."

On warm evenings the family, with Ben, sat outside the door. The nights were full of insect chirps, the croaking of bullfrogs in the slough, and the sound of growing corn and grain. Dragonflies, their wings silver in the moonlight, darted near, and an occasional owl screeched weirdly. Ben's voice, solemn, droning, gay, as the song demanded:

"For I'm a young cowboy and I know I've done wrong."

One evening Ben went to the granary where he kept his belongings and produced a fiddle. Tuning it up and holding it across his knee, he gave his repertoire—a varied one. When he finally struck up *The Irish Washerwoman*, there was a twinkle in his eye. As he knew they would, Tim and Nell began to dance. Repairing to the kitchen, they faced each other and jigged. Nell was light as a feather on her feet, and Tim brought his down in true clog fashion. Kitty Ann led the children, and they all joined in the dance.

"It's a long time since I heard them old-timers, them treasures," Tim said smiling. "Where did you get a-hold of them?"

"In the army," Ben answered. "My chum was a young Irishman. This was his fiddle. After he left me and I was alone I learned them pieces in his memory. Finer lad never lived. Being here sort of brings him back."

Although the Connors were in an exultant frame of mind and called for an encore, Ben would play no more that night. Putting his fiddle in his worn case, he went to his quarters in the granary.

When the well was almost finished and the new wooden pump lay in the yard waiting to be set in, the Connors had their first peddler. A dark-skinned, foreign-looking man, wearing store clothes and with a cumbersome pack strapped to his shoulder, knocked at the door.

"How do," he said to Nell.

She answered: "How do."

"You be English," he announced rather than asked.

"Yes."

"I be English. You be Cat'lic?"

Nell nodded.

"I be Cat'lic. I show you my goods."

When "the goods" were displayed, the young Connors swarmed over the man and his wares. Could anyone imagine so many things to be in one satchel! "Can I have this? Can I have this?" they asked.

"Don't tore it. Don't broke it," he pleaded, trying to rescue the most valuable "goods."

Nell interposed and placed the children in a row, in seeing but not in reaching distance.

"I have no money," she repeated, as the peddler insisted on selling her articles of his own selection. "You have a nice scissors that I would like to buy if I could. I need a scissors. How much is it?"

"Seventy-five cents," he stated. "Take one, nice lady. You can buy one. Me poor man. Me send money to wife in Arabia. You got money."

"No." Nell smiled. "I can't buy. Thank you for showing them. Move back, children, so he can put his trays in."

"You be nice lady. You give me supper and bed and I give you something."

Nell said: "All right, you can take your pack to that granary there. There is where you will sleep."

The peddler refused to allow the goods out of his sight.

That evening, as they gathered outside the door, the peddler sat aloof. He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and resting it on the palm of one hand began on its right-hand corner to make a series of hieroglyphics across to the left. The crowd pressed close to him, watching him as he wrote dexterously.

Ben commented: "I've seen a good many people of all kinds and knocked about as much as anyone; but that beats all. Thought that scratching was left to the Chinese."

"Arabic. We had some of that back East," Tim said.

"Come here," Ben said, ignoring the guest with the exotic atmosphere. "Come here, Emmet, and I'll see if I can show you the Black Hills tonight." Catching the boy by the two ears, he attempted to raise him from the ground. "Still too heavy," he announced. "Too much mush and milk. Afraid, sonny, you'll have to wait until you grow up to see the Hills."

After the peddler had finished writing, he said he would go to bed and went towards the granary.

Thereupon Ben stood up and stretched lazily. "Guess I'll be turning in, myself."

The peddler occupied the oats bin, and the well-digger the wheat bin. Each was very suspicious of the other. During the night at the least sound both would sit up and face each other across the partition.

Next morning before the peddler departed he gave Nell not the scissors but a towel bordered in red.

Nell thanked him; he said he would come again, asked if the neighbor to the east were Dutch, High German, Luxemburger, Catholic, shouldered his pack, and started off.

"Did your Mommy get the scissors?" Ben asked Danny as he emptied a bucket of yellow clay.

"No, she got a 'throw.' "

"A 'throw'?"

"Yes, a fancy towel to tie on a chair."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he asked if Catholic and German lived in the next house."

"Gad, why didn't she fool him?"

As a relay runner waits only for the touch of his ally's hand to dart off, so Danny at Ben's inspiration followed after the disappearing figure.

"Say mister," he yelled. "Where are yuh going? Going to Schwartzes'? Say! better not go there. They're not Catholic."

"Not Cat'lic?"

Danny shook his head.

"Me don't care."

"Ain't you Catholic?" Danny asked.

"No," he answered.

Danny returned to the well-digger. He was puzzled. "Well, he told Mom he was English and a Catholic," Danny argued.

"That's the way he gets the people's attention at the door, sonny. He finds out from the neighbors and then that's what he is for the occasion."

Tim was amused at the peddler's attempted duplicity. Nell was rather chagrined. She displayed the "throw," however; and after the children had gone to bed she told of their excitement over the peddler's wares. "They went for that satchel like chickens for a hot mess. I was actually mortified."

Tim and Ben only chuckled; men didn't seem to understand. The peddler, such as he was, was a guest, and the children hadn't known how to act.

Nell brushed back her hair a bit with the palm of her hand, an action that she had lately acquired. "They're growing up so wild. Wonder the man gave me anything, they worried him so. And Danny overtaking him and telling him that today. If anything had happened to him at Schwartzes' we would have been responsible. As it was, Katto drove him off the place with the pitchfork."

Ben roared heartily. "I'd give anything to have seen that. I'd give a whole lot."

The well-digger then sat up straight. "Folks," he said, "you've got the finest bunch of young ones that I ever set my eyes on, and I've seen a plenty. Don't you fret now about manners," he turned to Nell. "These polished manners are like a cloak that anyone can put off and on; but real manners come from the heart. That's what counts. These young ones got the stuff in them. Some day that Danny will be doing something—running a locomotive into the country or be on his way to Washington. Sheila's as pretty a picture as I've ever seen, and I've seen a plenty. Some dandy will be trying to steal her off your hands one of these days. Margaret lives in a world of her own; and Kitty Ann is a rascal after my own heart."

"There now, Nell, listen to that," said Tim, well pleased. "Now maybe you won't be doing so much useless worrying. The childer didn't suit that heathen of a peddler, but they suit Ben, a dang sight better judge, I'm after saying."

"But poor John, I guess, thinks they are savages." Nell was tired. She had had a long day, what with the extras and the children.

"That Johann, or whatever he calls himself," Ben spoke up, "will do well to stay over there and stare into the eyes of that vacant-faced girl he has in that frame. Your black cow has more expression than she has."

"Oh, Ben," Nell admonished. "She has a good face, and John surely loves her."

"Deliver me from hot Dutch love," was Ben's conclusion.

After the well was finished and a tight platform built above it, Ben said that he would stay and build on Sheila's room. The Connors were delighted; but after the room was finished they must allow him to go away and dig other wells.

Tim went to town and got some money at the bank to pay Ben.

The children were tearful at his leave-taking.

"Don't pick up with some Dutchman, now," he said to Sheila. "Wait till the right man comes along. That Herman Schwartz is sort of keeping an eye on you. Beware."

Danny clung to Ben's hand. "Sonny," the well-digger said, closing a gold coin in the grimy fist, "your Mommy thinks that you haven't got much chance here;

but I'm going to tell you this. You can be whatever you want to be and make of yourself whatever you wish. Anyone with ambitions and a Poppy and Mommy like you got holds their future in their hand just as you hold *that*." He pressed his hand around the boy's. "And I'm coming back."

The old nag, unused to the bridle, yielded reluctantly as Ben gave a jerk to its rein. "See," he said, "Prince don't want to go, neither," which brought smiles to the children's faces. Seeing them thus, he left.

"Saints be praised," Nell said when Danny disclosed the gold-piece in his hand, "he has given us back nearly as much as we paid him."

Ben gone, the youngest Connors ran off to visit the neglected Johann. Sheila and Danny left with the cattle. Tim went to the field. Alone, Nell stood with her hand on the new pump. She took a drink of the fresh water. Its clearness and coldness gave her a sense of great luxury. A good well. The bright new addition to the house. Later on, a harvester. A promising crop . . . prosperity indeed. Perhaps this year they could earn something besides interest money. Interest! There would be more interest now. How much interest would they have to pay before these luxuries—no, necessities, so prized that they seemed like luxuries—were paid for?

Well, she couldn't answer. She didn't know. She could only do her best and trust in God. Such crops were assuring and showed promise of good things. The grain just heading out was glossy in the sunlight, the prairie luxuriant with growth, and the corn so tall that the black earth was entirely shut from view. Tim was plowing in the distant green, and Johann's figure was bent

over his sod corn, hoeing, hoeing, hoeing. How slavishly poor Johann worked! Well, the young ones would be the cause of his stopping to draw his breath. . . .

When the children entered Johann's patch of sod corn they—Margaret and Kitty Ann and Robert Emmet and Ellen—were walking abreast. Johann hurried to meet them, admonishing: "Watch out! Watch out once for the little corn."

"We ain't breaking your old corn," Kitty Ann answered.

"Mom said that you can have water from our new well," Margaret said, hoping to gain favor.

"Ben is gone, gone," Robert Emmet said sadly.

"Tell your mother thank you. I will come for water," Johann said in a tone of dismissal, and resumed his hoeing. Perhaps the children in Johann's former life could be dismissed thus, but not the Connors of the prairie.

Kitty Ann thrust a brown little foot in the path of the hoe; Robert Emmet and Ellen did likewise. Ellen crowed with delight. It was a great game. Margaret, discerning the displeasure in Johann's eye, drew back.

Johann would take no risks hoeing under such circumstances. He cupped the handle of the hoe with both hands, rested his chin thereon, and stared at the children.

"Let's go over to Pop," Margaret suggested.

"Pop's got nicer corn than you." This from Kitty Ann.

Johann did not argue.

Annoyed, Kitty Ann added: "I wish the ground squirrels had eaten your old corn all up."

"I'm going to tell Mom on you," Margaret threatened the younger sister.

Not yet satisfied, Kitty Ann lagged behind the others. At the edge of the field she pulled up a stalk of corn and held it up to Johann; then, tossing it on the ground, she ran and caught up with the rest.

Johann went to the sod house for a little water and reset the stalk in its place. Mrs. Connor was a fine lady, he thought, but those young Connors. . . .! Picking up his hoe, he resumed his work in the field.

Johann was determined to get on in America. He knew that hard work would get him there; but he would have to know English. Sheila did not help him as much in her hour's time as Mrs. Connor did in a few minutes. Sheila, he concluded, was a good herdswoman but would never make a teacher. He had made headway in his studies while the well-digger was at Connors', for then he had not been disturbed or annoyed. He realized that he was learning the language readily, and wishing to master it he kept at it, repeating idioms and conjugations while he worked in the field, which was from dawn until night hid the green stalks.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE June morning Johann, as usual, was hoeing in his patch of sod corn when the sun, baring the nightly mysteries of the sky and prairie, pushed up its face over the rim of the world. A quivering breeze stirred the phlox and made music in the coarse slough grass. The reach of the prairie was limitless. In its waving motion, its distant shanties and soddies bobbed like flotsam. Wee fluffs of cloud, enhancing the blueness of the sky, sailed by, became a mist, and melted away. And the sky remained as blue.

The morning slipped away. The sun was in the zenith; still Johann remained in his field. He saw Nell Connor hoeing potatoes nearby, working also without regard for time.

Suddenly a large, dark cloud appeared in the west. Broadening out and roaring, it moved directly toward them. Terrified, Johann recalled confusedly strange phenomena. What was it? Anything might happen in a new country. The apparition as it settled lower became more and more terrifying. Its rumbling sound changed to a sonorous hum. The sun lost its light.

"Bad storm!" he shouted, as he ran toward Nell, who with uplifted face stood like a statue, staring into the sky.

The sky was filled with a storm of black flakes, the dark particles singling out and becoming more defined in shape as they descended. He heard a buzzing, saw shining wings, long bodies, legs. . . .

"Grasshoppers!" Nell's agonized voice rang out. "*Grasshoppers!* May God preserve us—the scourge of the prairie is upon us."

He saw her sink to the ground and cover her face with her hands.

Johann shouted and brandished his hoe. The horde descended. He tried to defend his field . . . his corn was a mass of shining bodies sucking, sucking the tender juices. He worked feverishly, knocking off feeders only to give place to others. He, himself was covered with grasshoppers. They crawled over his face, his eyes, and invaded his clothes. The limitless stretch of prairie was not vast enough to hold them all. He surrendered to them, and went toward Connors'. As he walked, his boots became slimy with crushed bodies.

The succulent prairie grass was converted into a moving mass as the hoppers piled up in their greed.

Nell joined him in the yard. "Thank God we're safe, anyhow," she said.

Tim, who was at the county seat with Weiss, could not return home before evening; but Sheila, who was herding, and Danny who was taking his father's place plowing corn soon came running in. "The horses are gone," Danny announced, crying with fear and excitemen. "When it got so dark they acted so funny I unhitched their tugs and they ran away. I can't even see where they went."

"They'll come back. Don't bother about them. It's a miracle they didn't kill you." Nell's face was as white as chalk. Her blue eyes were dark. She was trying hard to regain her self-control.

"The cattle went wild, too," Sheila broke in, all out of breath. "They bellowed so and sniffed the ground like when they see blood. I put for home."

"Let 'em go. Don't go near 'em. They can go where they want now—there's nothing to save, I guess," Nell said with resignation.

Robert Emmet and Ellen, still terrified, clung to Nell. She held them closely, wishing to impart to them some of her trust, her thanks. . . . "The children might have been killed by those frightened animals."

Hysterical shrieks broke in on the temporary calm. From across the field they saw Katto Schwartz approaching. Johann moved back toward the house as she faced him. Shaking her fist first in the direction of the sky and then at the pests at her feet, she went through her repertoire of imprecations. Stamping her calloused bare feet, she crushed the slimy horde with a vengeance. While the sun shone on her glazed calico dress and disclosed tawny strands in her dishevelled hair, she ground her teeth and was shaken by a tremor which agitated her excess of flesh.

Mrs. Connor's attempt at calming her was of no avail. "Come," she said finally. "I'll make the coffee."

"All right," Katto acquiesced, her voice lowered considerably. "We'd better drink it once before something gets it from us. I said the devil would get the crop; but we got good measure—all hell is turned loose."

Johann declined to have coffee with the women. Bewildered, he moved toward his soddy which he found veneered a shiny brown. He had never had a door, so the invaders had entered and taken possession of his

house, even testing the edibility of his old red stove. He went to the field for his hoe, and began his futile struggle to dislodge them.

The Connor children watched for their father, while they worked in the garden helping Nell wrest what was possible from the plunderers.

Danny talked glibly. "Hey, you old pigs! Get off of those carrots." It was really a hand-to-hand struggle, for the invaders persisted in having their share, even while the vegetables were being pulled.

Margaret spied a dark speck in the east. Soon they recognized horses' bobbing heads, and like a flash they ran to meet Tim and Weiss.

There was an exchange of waving, then a series of: "Hello, Pop," and the children climbed into the wagon.

"Pop, we got the grasshoppers!"

"And they put out the sun . . . !"

"My, we were so scared!"

"They ate everything up, Pop. John thought it was a cyclone; but when Mom saw their wings and everything, she knew it was grasshoppers."

"—and she cried, too."

"We fighted with them in the garden. Our cave is full of stuff."

Peter Weiss stood silently in the wagon. The joints of his hands were knobbed as he held the reins tightly. An occasional tear trickled down his beard. . . . He could see his farm.

The children spied a wooden pail. "What's that?" they asked at once.

"I see that they didn't carry you or your curiosity away," Tim said lightly. "I brought you some jelly."

"Jelly? What's jelly?"

Tim drew out his knife, ripped up the lid of the pail, and gave each child a quivering, ruddy slice. "Here's a bit of a taste now and you can put some on bread when we get home."

"M-m-m, it's good," they commented in unison.

"And Pop," Margaret took up the recital of events again, "Katto got mad and sent her curses up to God. She won't go to Heaven, will she, Pop?"

"Even as you and I, childer. Katto's all right. There's no harm in Katto."

Tim could see the destruction in his own fields now. His usually erect figure slumped dejectedly and he swallowed hard. "Everything all gone, eh? Wheat patch, too?"

"Yes," Danny answered. "They bent the stalks. See, Pop, the patch is all brown."

That evening they spoke little of grasshoppers, although the insects were omnipresent, clicking, jumping and dashing their bodies against the house. Tim, as usual, related his experiences at the county seat and told the news picked up that day.

Nell, lulling Ellen on her knees, asked: "Did you get Weiss's trouble fixed up all right? Was it so serious as he imagined?"

"Well, serious enough," Tim answered with a reminiscent smile. "A St. Paul concern had a chattel mortgage on his two hogs and a spavined mule that he'd brought back from the Black Hills. Last winter his

family ran short of food, so they ate the hogs; and to cap the climax the old mule died. So Weiss was in a terrible way: he was afraid it was to jail he'd have to go."

"Did you settle it for him?"

"I don't think they'll bother Weiss any more about it. Young Peck was there to represent the company—Peck's a fine, decent fellow. After he had made his plea, I stood up and told them that the family was forced to eat the hogs or starve, and that the old mule had withstood all other calamities in its cosmopolitan life, but the chattel mortgage had proved fatal. The court had a great laugh, and the case was dismissed."

"Childer, you should have seen the funny fellow they had there today," he went on. "His clothes were a mass of rags sewed and quilted together. They said he'd been around the country for some time and when people spoke to him he got down on hands and knees and crept into the cornfields. As he was scaring the people, the sheriff rounded him up and brought him in. And he discovered that in between the layers of his tatters was money, paper money, gone to chaff with dry rot. And he had gold on him, too. I saw him there. He wasn't old; he had a fine face and looked bright. I couldn't help but think he had good connections. He wouldn't give his name. He only said: 'Call me John Doe.' I believe they took him to Cherokee."

"What else did you see, Pop?"

"There was a hay twister for sale there. Twisted the hay up slick as a whistle. Bunch of us settlers looking at it in the morning thought we might buy one together

in the fall; but after we saw that scourge of hoppers land, I guess we thought no more of hay twisters. . . . That white courthouse was painted brown in a few minutes."

The impending depression forced itself in. Tim got up and walked out of the house.

He went through the grove and stood on the edge of the cornfield. The moonlight, bright as day, revealed the luster of the shiny pests, and the snapping and crackling of corn was like the subdued noise of cattle feeding.

Tim thought of neighbors who shared his fate as he saw their groves—dark rectangles against the sky. By their height one could determine the length of time the owner had been in the country. Schwartz's grove completely hid his house. Van Den Hull had one peeping window in which a yellow light gleamed. Johann's shack remained a clod of black earth.

In the grove behind him and in the fields before him was the eerie rustling, a sucking away of the food of his family. Just when they had dared to hope and had been so bold as to involve themselves more deeply in debt—the well, Sheila's room, the harvester—had come this calamity. Surely they would not force him to take that harvester when there was no harvest. He would write and cancel the order.

The children's words returned to him. . . . Mom had cried. "Poor girl! Poor childer! I picked the devil's own country for them. This prairie charmed me like a snake, to strike not only me but Nell and the young ones as well. . . . Yes sir, the devil's own country!

Still, can fortune always be so bad? It's a long lane that hasn't a turn!"

He walked back to the house. The light was turned low. The even breathing and sleepy mutterings of healthy children filled the house. Nell was kneeling by the open window of the bedroom, her dark hair hanging down her back, her face resting on the sill. She was praying, in an attitude of dejection. The hundreds of eyes watching her through the window completely shut off her vision of the stars.

"Nell," Tim spoke out. "Good luck will come to us yet, I'm a-thinking. 'The darkest hour is just before the dawn.' "

Johann could not accept this calamity so philosophically as did the Connors. He tried to seek out a reason, but there was no reason; there was no justification for such a phenomenon.

"It's God's will, John. Accept it as such and you can bear it better," Nell repeated. "Remember, God never closes one gap but He opens another. Keep your trust in God."

But Johann could not be convinced. Often he stood in the doorway where he had succeeded in scraping a pile of the pests, and allowed them to become scattered again as he leaned on the handle of his hoe asking: Why? Why? Why the incongruity in the scene before him? Sometimes he felt raised to the capability of real struggle when he contemplated the sky so blue, so guileless, the prairie—a strange place, holding the answers to his questions in its sinister silence. In his

meditations he felt cut off from the world. All about him nothing was distant, yet all was distance.

There was no harvest time that year, for there was no crop to harvest. All the fields about were stripped, and Johann's sod corn was reduced to sod; coarse grass again found root. Tearfully he looked at his ten acres which had lost their identity as a patch under cultivation. Toil wasted, hope deferred.

"You must learn to accept fate," Tim Connor said again and again, but Johann could not be resigned to the caprices of a new country. He saw only its unfairness. The fact that Emma's coming must be postponed dominated his thoughts. Other people, daily events, were unreal, like voices in a fog. It perturbed him not at all that movers were headed East. Too, many of the neighbors were leaving. Schwartz said that he would stick as long as Connor and starve with him. Max Steindler scoffed at hard times—Max had other resources, his wife's money. The Hollanders were staying. A few neighbors, however, of whom Nell Connor had become very fond, were loading their household goods into the wagons. Among these were the Hurds, who were going back to New Jersey. Nell went over to see them and asked if Johann could move their granary and live in it through the winter.

"Take it all," Mr. Hurd said. "I don't ever want to set eyes on this godforsaken country again. It's taken my wife's health, all our inheritance, our best years, and—Benny. I turn my land over to the hoppers. Take the buildings. I wouldn't give you five dollars for the whole township. I'll never come back."

"I'll not say come back. I'd like to be going myself, back to civilization and decency," Nell said, wiping her eyes, "but Tim would never leave, I know he wouldn't. And I suppose I'd be worrying, too, about those we left behind. Goodbye and good luck. Think of us when you come into your kingdom."

And the Hurds followed in line with the discouraged settlers who swung their horses toward the East.

CHAPTER XVIII

DURING this exodus, there was a great demand for horses—horses to carry people out of the country. Many of the immigrant settlers had never used oxen, consequently were unaccustomed to them. Jake Sheckel, the livery man at Casper Center, had sold most of his best teams and was out scouring the country for substitutes. He called at Connors'.

"Let's give him Jack and Jule, in God's name," Nell suggested, "and Buck and Spec can do all the hauling we'll need." Tim brought the team from the barn for appraisal. He was being hounded for interest money. Winter was coming, and there must be food and clothing.

"I hate to give 'em up," he argued. "Poor faithful critters brought me in out of many the blizzard. But it's a blessing we have them to sell."

Nell moved up to the liveryman. "You'll be kind to them? They're not large and can't pull heavy loads."

"Livery work won't hurt them," Sheckel answered brusquely. "They're not my style of horse, but I don't expect business to be great this year. Tell you what I'll do. I'll buy them now and give you a good price; but I won't sell them until I see you first. Maybe when the country'll be demanding fleeter horses, you will be in a position to buy them back."

"Now that's kind of you. I'll have no fear of them in your keeping," Nell replied.

So the hard shiny money was placed in Tim's hand,

and Jack and Jule were led away. In a row, the Connors —from Tim to Ellen—watched them out of sight. Poor Jack and Jule, who had come between them and want!

Next day Tim went off to town in great spirits to pay interest, but he returned home rather disconsolate. In the mail had come a notice of the arrival of his harvester at Malcur, the terminus of the road. The company had not accepted his cancellation of the order. He must take it whether or no. "Any man that had land," they argued, "could pay for a harvester. A bargain is a bargain."

Nell knew that Tim, though clever enough in pleading the case of another, was easily overcome in his own defense. They would make him buy that harvester! She failed to convince him of the righteousness in not accepting it, so she dispatched Danny for Schwartz.

"You're a dumb fool if you buy that, Tim," Schwartz began.

"Yes, but they say that I'll be having to pay for it whether I take it home or not. In that case, I'd better get it."

"Pay for it!" Schwartz repeated. "Now, Tim, you know as well as I do that you got nothing to pay for that harvester. Everything you got is mortgage same as mine." He spat tobacco vehemently. "They can't make you pay for it if you don't take it. That's threats, Tim, threats. You know that, too, same as I."

Katto, having caught the drift of the argument, offered advice. "I tell him if I was you that he and harvester can rot there at depot before you take it home and make more mortgage and interest. *Interest*. They think, by Gutt, that's all we got to pay—interest!"

"That's right, Katto," Tim agreed. "That's all we do pay. Some of us can't even pay that."

"I got my cornplow," Schwartz added, "and use it before grasshoppers come, but he can wait for pay. I got no pay."

"You tell him for me," Katto's face was close to Tim's again, "that if he wants pay to try and get it once. He won't try another time."

"I'll go over and see him tomorrow and hear what he has to say," Tim said calmly. "I don't want trouble about it. I'd sooner take it."

"That's the kind of fool you are, Tim, dumb fool," Schwartz spoke up once more. "I'd stay away from there. If you got so much to pay for things you don't use, maybe you could pay for my cornplow once." He shifted his feet from their right-angled position, drew his forefinger across his nose and limped away; Katto followed, paddling along in her bare feet.

Tim's determination to make a trip to the railroad filled Danny with delight—now he could go to a distant town. After Schwartzes left, he climbed to the top of his corner tree to sight the cattle. "Next time I climb you," he said, "I'll know what a train looks like."

He saw a red speck in the distance—the herd—and ran off to help Sheila bring in the cows.

As he bounded over jointed blue stem, with Captain at his heels, he rejoiced that tomorrow he would see what was behind that line where the curving sky met the grass, back of Webber's willows. He would see hills, and trees that grew without being set out and watered, and trains and big houses and towns.

After supper that evening Tim went to a meeting of

settlers who wished to denounce the Herd Law. "People who have no crops cannot buy barbed wire," they argued, "and cattle must be given food."

Danny, uninterested for the time in Herd Law agitation, washed his feet with soap and hot water. Nell washed his face and tawny head. He said his prayers in the kitchen and climbed to the loft. Through the small window he watched a patch of stars and the milky way, and the filigreed tip of a cottonwood stirring very gently, very gently. . . .

The low room was filled with white light when he awoke. He ran to the window to look for clouds. The yard was full of shadows—trees criss-crossed each other; the moon shone, sharp and clear as crystal. The voices of his parents floated up to him; there was the odor of barley coffee. It was morning! Dressing quickly, he climbed into the kitchen where Tim was eating. Preoccupied, Tim did not notice Danny until the boy spoke: "We're starting awful early, ain't we?"

Tim, chewing rapidly, said without looking at him: "Son, you'd better stop at home and help Sheila with them cows. They got into Max's bit of flax yesterday. Sheila won't be able to handle them alone, now once they got a taste of it. Max complained last night—and you couldn't blame him. Funny Sheila didn't tell us about it." He stood up and kicked in his chair.

Tim was a tall man, straight and slender, with an aquiline nose which gave him a severe look; his kind blue eyes were not noticed by Danny that morning, as he kept them lowered, preoccupied. "Devil's own job I have on hand today."

Danny slipped out of the house and ran like a

wounded deer. Through high weeds, the grove, to the corner tree. He flung his arms around the tree and pressed his face against its bark. If the tree would only enfold him and render him insensible to life. Perhaps it would . . . !

A catbird shrieked at him. From the prairie came: "Kildee, kildee."

Salty tears found their way to the boy's lips. His tension relaxed. Relief had come with weeping.

He stiffened a little as he heard his name pitched high and sweet: "Danny, Danny." As an answer he gave way to more violent sobbing. After a few moments he felt himself being loosened from the tree, and he looked into Nell's face. He saw a thin woman with graying curly hair. There were tears in her round blue eyes, but her lips smiled; in her hand she held his gingham jacket and pants.

"Come on," she said, "you must hurry and get changed because I want you to look respectable in the bank. I hope your father won't have to take that harvester."

Not until after he was dressed and combed could he find voice. "Can I *go?* Did Pop say I could?"

"Yes, I'll manage the cows with Sheila. Queer Max should have saved a field of flax."

Danny did not answer her, nor could he assist with the hitching. Like a stranger he climbed to the seat of the wagon. Tim came from around the shed. He had on his best shirt and a greenish felt hat.

Buck, the big ox with teeth worn off flat as squash seeds, was led to the wagon; Spec, grazing across the yard, came over slowly and stood in his place on the

other side of the tongue. The key was fitted into the bow, the heavy chain wound around the tongue and fastened, and then Tim took his place beside Danny.

Nell, with Ellen in her arms, stood on the doorstep in the half light as they struck off to Malcur, following the north-south trail. Nell's face—round blue eyes glistening, full red lips smiling—floated along with Danny.

After they had passed the corner school and Webber's willows, Danny sat up and watched closely for strange sights. There was a haze in the distance which would disappear with the coming of the sun. The sun rose. Now he would see! Sunlight, however, disclosed nothing unusual: wild roses mottling the grass; glossy-backed grasshoppers; rosin weeds oozing out gum; curlews uttering prolonged piercing calls; prairie chickens slipping away from the feet of the oxen; black, newly-dug-out badger mounds.

Mile after mile was traveled; the sun moved higher and higher. They came no nearer to the line where the sky and prairie met.

"Here's the big slough now," Tim remarked. Danny's hopes arose. He would see something here? Nothing: humped-up blue heron, muskrats swimming toward conical houses, marsh wrens, redwings, yellowheads, wild ducks trailed by young.

"When will we come to the end of this? When will we see big trees, Pop, and hills? I thought I'd see hills."

"No, child, not here. The prairie here is this way. Over around the Sioux you find some hills and a bit of timber. Look, see the thunder heads?" Tim pointed to a range of billowy clouds above the horizon. "The

heat is sweltering. I was just thinking about Aladdin's lamp. Did I ever tell you that story?"

"Oh, I know that story, Pop."

"Well, we'll have it again. That lamp would come handy here."

As Tim related the story, Danny forgot the heat of the sun. He was rubbing Aladdin's lamp and was bringing to the prairie all the mysteries of the outside world.

Tim nudged him and pointed. "There's Malcur now, there before us. How do you like it?"

"Why—it's just a few houses—like our house and the corner school." Danny was in tears.

"Come, come, me bye. Dry up. I guess the sun was too hot for you."

Arriving in the town, Danny discovered that the people were not different from themselves. And Pop was not in awe of the strangers, but joked and shook hands with them. Pop was too easy with the implement dealer. He bought the harvester, and got money in the bank for a payment. That would make Mom feel bad.

Danny went over to the railroad track. He knelt and felt of the iron and of the wood, and noted how they were fastened together. Standing, he looked to where the shiny rails reached the eastern horizon. It required a train to carry one beyond this prairie. He closed his fists and raised his chin while his eyes dreamily followed the scintillating rails. "When I get big. . . ."

Large drops of rain splashed about him. Thunder mumbled. He hastened to the wagon. They were loading the harvester. Having placed two heavy planks across the top of the wagon box, and calling all by-

standers to give a lift, they hoisted the new piece of machinery on the planks, and it projected over the sides of the wagon. It was a large, awkward harvester with which one had to bind the bundles by hand—a little improvement over the old reaper.

Rain which had been threatening came on in a great flood. Tim and Danny ate a lunch of crackers, cheese and gingersnaps; bought a few groceries, and waited for an abatement of the storm. About three o'clock the downpour ceased and the sun appeared. Climbing into the wagon, they set out for home and after a few hours travel drove into a deluge of rain and wind. A piece of old quilt was rolled around the groceries and they were placed directly under the harvester. Evening came early, darkness fell, and the rain continued. Tim could not see to guide the oxen, and they lunged the wheels in and out of the deep ruts. In this jerking, one of the side planks slipped; a corner of the harvester dropped on the wagon box, and a bolt loosened from its fastening grated on the wheel. They tried to lift the corner on to the plank again, but it was impossible—the bolt continued to rasp on the wheel.

Before entering the big slough, Tim touched up Buck and Spec with the goad. As the oxen drew the heavy load through the swollen slough, one heard loud breathing, the stamping of powerful legs, and the swishing, swishing of water from the wheels. It was necessary to lift the groceries to the seat, as water flowed over the box of the wagon. The contact of the displaced bolt and wheel squirted water on Danny's head.

Suddenly both oxen stopped with a jolt, lowered their heads, and drank in long gulps. Tim used his goad

freely, but they did not move. Danny looked up at Tim—the darkness hid his face.

The oxen drank a long time. Then simultaneously they raised their heads—stamped and slipped—stamped and found footing—there was a lunge—the chain sang like a fiddle—the axles creaked—the bolt began its rasping on the wheel—a spray of water hit Danny's head—they were on their way again. The oxen left the road often, and Tim crawled on hands and knee until he found the trail. Then he led the oxen until the wheels fitted into the rut, and they moved on.

Danny was nodding, and shivering with chill and anxiety, when Tim roused him. "We're near home now. See that light? Sit up and keep your eye peeled. Help me watch for it again."

Danny rubbed a soaked sleeve across his eyes and sat up. There was a speck of red in the darkness. It glowed and disappeared. It flashed again like a firefly. Finally it grew larger and stopped dodging away. Tim, then, unmindful of ruts, led Buck and Spec toward it.

As the snorting, creaking outfit stopped before the red square of light, a second larger square darted out to them—Nell stood in the doorway.

Danny went in first and carried the groceries. As Nell helped him into a dry shirt, he silenced her with his impressions: "I got to see a railroad track. We nearly got stuck in the big slough . . ." He ate heartily of hot corn mush and milk and was up in bed before Tim came in. The rain beat on the hatcher's wings, but the bed was warm and dry.

The kitchen door slammed; shoes dropped on the floor.

"Make me a bowl of tea. I'm wet without but dry within."

"I have it steeping. I see they made you take it."

"Yes, I took it. James gave me a loan at sixteen per cent for a first payment."

"*Sixteen* per cent! I hope to the good Lord we'll have use for a harvester next year. Here's dry clothes."

Ellen was fretful. Nell was humming one of Ben's songs. Danny tried to follow the tune with the words—"You can hear the hungry coyotes——"

Next morning, with Johann's help, the harvester was unloaded and stored away in the grove. The young Connors danced about it in great glee; but Nell followed it as though it were a coffin.

Tim aided Johann in moving Hurd's wooden structure to *his* premises. Johann bought a few boards and put in a tight new door. After re-establishing himself he felt more secure from the invading host, although his patch of window was often darkened. But he could not evade the hoppers. They dared to alight on Emma's tintype, and to deface the love letter which he wrote so painstakingly. They evidently wished to put an end to his sole consolation, his love; but in this they would fail. Emma's letters were manna, better than food or companionship. Her letters were his only comfort.

One morning, having arisen early to walk fifteen miles to the post-office, Johann saw his neighbor's boy, Herman Schwartz, outside his door awaiting his appearance. Herman was holding a box tightly in his arms and was shivering a little from chill. He raised his round white head to Johann. His small gray eyes, bright

and mysterious, shone as though they dwelt on some continual joy anticipated or remembered.

Johann knew of Herman's passion for drawing on anything available. He had seen him lingering around a cabin in construction as a buzzard hovers about a stray chicken.

Shyly now Herman advanced toward Johann, shifted his weight from one foot to the other, tilted his bright-eyed head, and said: "I make you something on your new door."

"All right, Herman, go ahead."

And Johann walked toward town carrying a letter to Emma close to his heart, while Herman hopped about and made a drawing on the inside of the new white door.

That evening when Sheila and Danny, driving in the herd, approached Johann's shanty they saw an immense grasshopper on the open door. As they drew near, its legs and antennæ seemed to oscillate. Danny immediately summoned his family, and on arriving they stood in a sort of fascination before the gigantic hopper. Herman had secured paints, and the hopper's brown back was glossy, the eyes red and malevolently glaring.

"If 'twouldn't offend Herman, I'd like to run the whitewash brush over the door," Nell said, perceiving Johann returning from town. "It gives me the creeps."

"Perhaps John won't mind it," Tim answered. "We'll see."

Johann arrived, tired and dejected—he had received no letter from Emma.

"Big grasshopper might eat you up," Kitty Ann

addressed him. He didn't smile with the others; in fact, he seemed unimpressed.

The Connors returned home. Johann went inside and closed the door; thus he swung in the grotesque hopper. He lighted the lamp, and brought into relief the weird companion in the desolate cabin. While contemplating the painting he experienced a great sadness, and with this sadness came pity, a pity not for himself but for Herman. In Germany he would have a chance and might become a great artist; but here . . . "O Gott!"

By late summer, the grasshoppers had disappeared. The mellow sun of autumn then revived the prairie. Where there was sufficient moisture, grass grew up anew; and, in these green patches, wild sunflowers and the delicate orange blooms of resin weed formed yellow islands which rushed to greet the eye until frost. The first frost covered the prairie with crystal; white and scintillating in the moonlight, multi-colored in the first rays of the sun. Freed tumbleweeds, little circus children in full skirts directed by the wind, performed untiringly on the level arena. Winter followed, with snow and unrelenting cold. The landscape was a stretch of white, a white sheet which for days and weeks grew thicker. Again the blue sky changed to a curtain of gray which shut out the world.

CHAPTER XIX

EVERYONE made preparations for cold weather. Houses were banked with sods until they had the appearance of earth houses. Yards were filled with stacks of slough hay. Sheds were re-thatched. All available provisions were stored. And the prairie bowed to winter.

Johann, as those about him, twisted slough grass for fuel and ground corn in his coffee mill for flour. But he was alone. There were no sounds in his house. Day after day and night after night he heard only the wind sweeping across the prairie. Alone with his thoughts . . . he wrote to Emma, conscious of a futility in the repetition of hopes and plans. There were long, monotonous weeks between the arrivals of mail. At times the silence and vastness of the outside were depressing, and the coyotes' howling around his shanty at night brought wild dreams.

But there was music on the prairie with the coming of spring—music and hope. The prairie released from gluttonous jaws and death, reveled in its re-birth. Its grasses were soft and green; its people walked sprightly, making every step a dance. The Connor children raced with the swift white clouds and raised their faces to the caressing air. There was much talk of seed grain, of breaking more land, and the gossip following belated newspapers and letters.

In May Mr. Connor brought Johann a letter in the fine, shaded script which all the neighbors had learned

to recognize. He waved the envelope from the wagon and Johann, with quickened pulse, hurried across the prairie.

He read that Emma had not had a lonely winter. Emil, his second cousin, had felt sorry for her and had taken her about. Johann turned pale as he folded the letter, and there was a childish, hurt look in the face that he raised to his neighbor.

Tim listened sympathetically. "Well, John, she won't be there next winter," he said with confidence.

Johann shook his head dubiously. "And Emil, yet, Emil, such a one." Suddenly he imbibed some of Mr. Connor's enthusiasm; he drew himself up proudly and orated: "This year I put in eighty acres. Look at the blue sky. In autumn, she can come." He answered the letter that evening and walked to the post-office during the night, saving the day for field work.

Although the settlers worked slavishly and planted every available acre to compensate for former losses, Johann was the most untiring worker in the neighborhood. He was in his fields each morning when chirping birds were yet invisible. While he worked, he planned. When Emil's dark face intruded on the dreams so wistfully woven, he clutched his plow handles more vigorously, driving the share deeply into the sod. Johann had his own plow now and a mortgage on his one-hundred-and-sixty.

In due time, wheat, oats, and then corn covered the blackness of the cultivated land. People were hopeful but skeptical. They watched the sky at each sudden clouding up, until it was a common sight to see entire families shading their eyes silhouetted against the hori-

zon, each one believing his own eyesight best. Sheila had a piece of colored glass, and often on the prairie she might be seen as a bronze figure peering at the sun, with hair disheveled and the wind whipping a tattered dress around her muscular body. Tim came upon her thus one day and he stood and noted her curiously. The sun which had lavished its gold in her hair had heightened the color of her face. It was the pollen of the flowers that flecked the blackness of her eye. She was part of it all, as natural, as primitive. There was the majesty of the prairie in her figure, and something of its mystery in her eyes. "It's true for Ben, the well-digger. She belongs here. Funny that Nell in her great love for her can't see that she is different!"

Aloud he said: "There's not a cloud, Sheila, me gypsy colleen. Don't be ruining your eyes with that glass. Come along, we'll take the cattle in."

As they walked along, Sheila was silent as Tim expatiated on the looks of the crops. "They were cowards that left a country like this. Blackguards."

Johann also prided himself on the appearance of his fields—his, the newly-arrived farmer's—until one day he saw a missing strip of grain, which he attributed to a balk in sowing. Next day there were many missing strips. Connor and Schwartz had done faulty sowing, too, he noted. But what was such a little loss where there was so much land, he thought, dismissing it.

Tim Connor startled him one morning as he was eating his breakfast, by pounding on his door. "John," he called—there was a tremor in the voice usually so cheerful. "John, what in blazes are we going to do?"

Johann, bewildered, his blonde hair standing upright on his head, hurried outside and raised his eyes in the direction of the sky.

"There is nothing," he said.

"Come, I'll show you." Tim led the way to the field and knelt beside the so-called "balk." "Look! They have us again!"

The ground was fairly alive with small, wingless insects—the larvae of the grasshoppers. "The grass is full of 'em, too," Tim added disconsolately. "I'm sorry to be the one to have such news for you. I saw 'em last night. I went to tell Schwartz, and he was coming to tell me, and we met. It'll be hard on Nell."

Realization finally dawned on Johann. *The crop was gone!* He sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands.

Tim, his hand on the boy's head, looked across at his own home, where a bluish curl of smoke was melting into blue sky. Nell. The children. Another baby coming. The boy before him broken in the first disappointment and bitterness of life.

"We'll get Emma here yet, John. Don't give up. We mustn't give up. Can't give up. Come over and have a bite of breakfast with us."

Johann attempted to speak but could not.

"John, it's pretty tough for you, I know; but wouldn't you sooner have Emma there where she has enough to eat, there in luxury, than to have her here with you in misery? If my family was secure I'd think little of the lonesome, John. *I* could stand it."

Johann shook his head and muttered: "No, no."

When Tim returned to his own yard, Nell called

from the doorway: "Your breakfast'll be tasteless waiting." Still Tim stayed in the yard doing unnecessary things: putting water in a chicken trough, going in and out of the barn, picking up a stray cob. Having decided on a plan, he went to the house, where he was greeted with roars of laughter—Ellen was performing under the tutorage of Danny.

"Stand like Schwartz, Ellen."

Ellen placed two chubby feet at right angles; and all looked at Tim for comment.

"Now show us how Schwartz walks."

And Ellen thereupon placed two hands behind her, humped her shoulders, and walked with a decided limp.

Tim could not refrain from smiling. He did not comment on the child's accomplishment; but blurted out: "Nell, would you and the childer like to go back East for a spell if I could see some way to get you the money?"

"Lord save us, Tim, have you been drinking? Or is it hard up you are for joking this morning?"

Contrary to custom, Tim had no repartee. He took a bite of potato and a gulp of coffee, swallowing with difficulty.

"What ails you, Tim?" Nell asked, wife-like, eyeing him sharply.

Tim rose from the table and gave his chair the characteristic kick. His eyes were glassy. There was a drop of moisture on the tip of his aquiline nose. "The crop—the crop's gone again," he said. "Young grasshoppers."

After the Connor ensemble had viewed the devastators, it was Nell who assured the tragic young faces raised to her. "God is good, children. We may die here

with other complaints but we'll never die with the hunger. Mark my words. I feel it." And to Tim: "We'll sell off the silverware and some other things to that new hotel in Shelbourne. Fool we'd be to take all our money to ride on a train. What'd we do back East? Hang our heads? *No.* I'll never hang my head nor will my children ever hang their heads because we came to the West. No-siree. There's that old carpet-bag—the first mail-bag used in Hadley—" she said to the children, "we'll hunt that out, Tim, and you can be striking off toward Shelbourne."

Tim was greatly relieved. Thank God for Nell's management and cheer.

"I'll walk, Nell, and not be bothered with the oxen. I'm a peddler now, childer. Me present faith, politics, and nationality are in jeopardy. They shall be changed at every door."

"Tim, such talk. The young ones might think you were in earnest." Nell was silent to Tim's responsive banter. She was selecting the silverware, fondling some pieces and shining others with a corner of her apron. "Look, Tim. The tablespoons we got from Panifers at Amherst."

"Nice spoons."

"I'll never forget the first time I met the Panifers," she said reminiscently, polishing the treasures. "I went up to Cattle Show with my uncle, and we met the Panifers. They took us to Dickinsons' with them for tea. Emily was serving it on the veranda of their large house. She is a poet, children. People rarely see her, and she poured tea for your grand-uncle and me. I wonder, Tim,

could I keep one spoon without losing too much on the set?"

"Better give the set if you give any."

Nell also packed silver received from a Northampton cutlery where Tim had been employed for a time. It was a heavy load. Tim shouldered the bag containing the wedding gifts of other days and struck off.

Johann, seeing him, was roused from his lethargic despair. He arose and stumbled to his shack—it was dark inside after the outer glare. A streak of light entering over his shoulder fell upon a statue of St. Christopher which Emma had given him; he had placed it upon the cornice beside her picture. Emma, with plump face and sleek hair, watched him blandly from her little frame. She had plenty to eat. Did she know? Could she ever understand? If she would only wait! And she had to go with Emil, yet . . . Emil, that wolf.

His eyes, accustomed to the dimness, saw the sordidness of his home: unplastered walls, bed, stove, table, few dishes, remnants of food, clothes and implements hanging from the scantlings. A ray of light scintillated on a metal weight of a dangling rope which had been used in moving the shanty. He turned to the doorway. Standing there, the sunlight painted his face with despair that proved the struggle of boyhood against adversity had failed. The light, too, heightened the dun coloring in the tattered jeans and shirt which hung loosely on his thin body. His neglected beard and his blonde, curly hair were at variance with each other. Before him were shanties, clods of earth scattered about by a contriving Hand, brave and struggling as the settlers themselves. His desti-

tute neighbors filed in mute procession before his consciousness, but he could not conceive nor did he try to conceive even a temporary remedy for present conditions.

Meanwhile settlers were meeting and deciding that it was useless to expect any crop at all; they must turn to other ways of earning a living. Many who formerly had been artisans went to Des Moines and other towns in search of employment. Schwartz and his oldest son, Nick, went out of the devastated region to secure farm work. Two of Max's daughters, Tilly and Julie, took advantage of the exodic movement and ran away to Sioux City, where they hoped to find work as hired girls. Tim, having disposed of his silverware to good advantage, sent to Northampton for cutlery and became a veritable peddler.

Johann, not being skilled in any special line and lacking the ingenuity to attempt anything new, spent the days killing the larvae in his fields. Katto made sport of him: "The greenhorn got it in the head." But Nell looked with sympathy at the poor boy.

"Gosh, John, you're foolish," Danny repeated. "Don't you see? They come right back on again."

Unmindful of comments or advice, Johann worked feverishly, his whole body becoming an automaton acting to rid at least part of his fields of the scourge.

By June he realized that his work was useless. The larvae, having received their wings, began to fly, and his fields were again infested even as the others. Coming and going with favorable winds, the hoppers sought food, richer fields. Migratory swarms, some so large that they eclipsed the sun and revealed the stars, brought terror to

the hearts of all. Nell, alone with the children, grew every day more hopeless and disheartened.

Tim's homecomings were occasions of great delight. He brought not only food but cheer, sincere or feigned, and news, both pathetic and humorous.

The devastation was general in northwestern Iowa. Trains found it necessary to carry sand. In locations where the hoppers gathered in great numbers on the rails, grease from their crushed bodies imperiled the safety of the train; the track accordingly had to be liberally sanded before progress could be made .

Despite the grasshopper plague, politics was active in preparation for the fall election. There was great rivalry for state representative. All realized that someone should be selected who could secure relief measures for his district. Nate Young, "a high-toned lawyer," who was so wealthy that he burned coal for fuel, was opposing Jim Lang, who styled himself "a hay-twister."

Tim refrained from telling of the many prairie shacks with the door nailed shut, of the pitiful tales from settlers' families, of despair, of lean cattle and hungry children. His own children were petulant and hollow-eyed. He knew that they, like himself craving the greens which they could not procure, were conscious of a constant gnawing hunger.

But the news which really interested the Connors was that a bounty again had been put on gophers. Led by Danny, they spent the entire day on the prairie. Schwartzes were out, too, and the remaining daughters of Max. They hauled water, made snares, and used all ingenuity possible to secure pelts. Pelts were used as

money and could be handed over the counters for five cents in trade.

Nell tried to interest Johann. "Why don't you get out and catch some gophers, and earn a little? It will be good pastime for you, anyhow. Go along with the children. Clean up the pests. They will be eating your corn next year," she added, hoping to impress him.

"No, I plant no more corn for hoppers and gophers," he answered dejectedly.

"Don't give up so soon, John. See how long we've been here, and we haven't given up like that," Nell tried to argue. But it was useless. She knew nothing would convince Johann but a good harvest, and that she could only hope for.

The pendulum of gayety which swung so religiously in the Connor home stopped one summer morning to welcome Connors' sixth child. Tim dispatched Danny for the wife of Max; Sheila disappeared on the prairie; Margaret gathered the younger ones around her in the grove and bade them kneel down. "Pray for Mom," she said. "Pray for Mom."

Tearfully and full of wonder they obeyed.

Later as they gathered about Mom and the new sister, their eyes were still round, their faces solemn.

But Mom smiled! . . . Their bewilderment vanished.

And as the spirit of happy living took up its régime again, little Alice, "the baby born in grasshopper times," accepted her home on a barren prairie.

Johann, when he heard the announcement, was sitting on his big stone listlessly watching, with glassy blue

eyes, the gluttonous grasshoppers sucking the moisture from the oozy bottom of the wallow, denying the flitting blue-winged ephemera footing for their brief day. He started at the sound of a voice calling to him. It was Danny's.

"I got a new sister. Gosh, she's funny looking. Pop says she's the color of the grasshoppers, but Mom says she's the prettiest baby of all."

Johann experienced a peculiar feeling, a relief on hearing the message—the lives of the settlers were affecting him, although he did not realize it.

"Wait," he called to Danny. "I go along."

When he greeted Mrs. Connor she said nothing, simply smiled at him. In her face he saw something of the beauty and the ruggedness of the Hartz mountains and the calm of a prairie twilight.

"I go to town," he told her, "and bring the baby a birthday gift."

"Never mind, John. Save your money."

During Nell's indisposition, the wife of Max cared for the new baby, and Sheila had charge of the house. Herman Schwartz, who at any time might be seen about the prairie, was often at hand to carry water or twist fuel for Sheila.

One day as Johann left the Connors' house, Herman came from behind the barn, his eyes, losing their irresponsible look, filled with tears. He held his hand over his heart and shifted his weight from one bare foot to the other.

"If I get an artist," he said profoundly, "I will paint Sheila."

Johann was absently watching the over-fat Plymouth Rocks scratching in vain among the hoppers, with which they were gorged, for a shoot of grass.

Herman, bareheaded, his light hair bleached white, edged up more closely to Johann, whose old felt hat without a ribbon band hung limply in ripples about his face.

The younger boy said falteringly: "Sheila loves you, Johann. I am afraid for it."

Johann had noticed Herman's feet; he was always disturbed when he saw those feet, remarkable feet that could combat the thorns of the sloughs without festering, feet free from abrasions. Johann himself, not being able to replace his boots, walked gingerly and not with impunity even in the yard. He made no comment on the announcement so painful to Herman, but walked off toward the big stone to dream his own dreams. But he could not dream—Emma had not written for a long time.

The wife of Max enjoyed her service in the Connor home. She told Max that she should receive pay, and he allowed her to come, Mary now being able to care for him. A pleasant week was her payment.

"It's just like a visit. Like when I lived in Dyersville I went to visit my brother." Tilly and Julie had good places, she said, with Yankee families in Sioux City. "But I feel so bad once for Lena. Lou and Lena are promised now. They want to go to Sioux City, too. They can not marry here, for Max will stop it. He don't want that Lou shall leave. Lou is a good hired man, but I want that they shall not go without marriage."

"They mustn't," Nell said, raising herself to her elbow. "Alice'll have to be baptized—we'll see Father Leurmann then, and arrange a marriage for later on. I'd like to get to Mass, too, some time before the cold weather. And I believe I could understand the German sermon pretty well now."

"You can understand," the wife of Max assured her. "You talk good, too. You learn quick."

"I don't know what I talk now,—a little of everything, I guess. But we have a harder time learning your language than you have learning ours."

The wife of Max was not convinced. If only she could read the third reader with the ease even of Kitty Ann! She made progress, however, in her reading and writing during her week's stay, for there were lessons daily. Nell and Alice were not difficult patients, and the time passed with regret.

"I must be getting out now," Nell announced one day. "I'm tired of the bed, and there is so much waiting for me. That John worries me—his girl seems impatient. Sheila must be gotten ready to teach. The county can not open the schools till winter—it has no funds—but we'll have Sheila ready by that time."

The wife of Max showed her approval of all Nell said by displaying her square yellow teeth.

Sheila, leaning against the kitchen window, did not approve. She had no ambition for teaching. Secretly, too, she wanted to run out, off, away on the prairie. Life seemed kinder out there. Flights of migratory hoppers were less portentous, and perplexities were more ephemeral.

When Nell, pale, smiling, with lines added to her face, was at her post again, Sheila resumed her work and play with the children. "Take out your History," Nell reminded, "and be looking it over. Your History will require extra study. I won't have time to take you for a week or two."

As the Herd Law was disregarded, herding required the taking out and bringing in of the cattle at schedule time. The interest in gopher hunting waned after the unwary had been caught. Only Danny remained persistently at it.

Sheila traveled far with the cattle as they sought out something to crop. Often she sat with her textbook neglected in her lap, her eyes fixed on the line where the sky met the prairie, weaving her future life: a haze of prairie mysteries, soft caressing winds, birds' songs, sunsets and afterglows—and with the afterglows came a lover—who would the lover be? Would it be Herman? Would it be Johann? Who *would* the lover be? Did someone answer? "Me-e. Me-e-e." No, it was only the wind in the grass, the clicking of hoppers. Dutifully Sheila would pick up her History and open it at the Revolutionary War.

At such times, Herman, springing from a tuft of grass where he had been hiding, would present her with some dainty: a small parcel of brown sugar, or a cleanly washed turnip. And as Sheila ate the treat with relish, she felt that the answer she heard in the grass was not Herman's.

Occasionally at night she would try to recall her imagery of the day, but her dreams then were dreams of

a land of plenty—food, clothes, no books to study, homes without arduous duties, and where there was painless childbirth.

Neighbors met occasionally and discussed conditions; but Johann remained isolated. In vain did Nell try to arouse him, to make him give vent to his feelings, or to confide in her. In spite of her visits he remained aloof.

He barred his door at night. To him the grasshoppers had become a symbol, an army starving out the settlers. It was war, a war without the satisfaction of bloodshed or slaughter; it was more horrible than the wars of his people which he had come to America to escape. Everything was wrong! Perhaps this Iowa should never have been settled! The plowing up of its original beauty was no doubt a desecration. If that were the case, he was powerless to remedy it; everyone was powerless. Avoiding neighbors, he pondered. Bareheaded and barefooted, he walked miles on the prairie as though to some destination; but he sought only a solution, a relief. He returned each night under a tranquil sky, dazed and heartsick, his only companion a sinister shadow stalking along, out of harmony with the contours of the night.

Nell Connor pleaded incoherently, seeing tragedy in the young man's face. "Go back to Germany—take your little money and go back East. You could teach a language there. Your father would be glad to see you through, John."

Johann could not answer; but after his well-meaning neighbor had disappeared, he thought of what she had said.

Yet he knew that he would not return to Germany if he had had the money. He was too proud for that. How his father would laugh! No doubt he would be glad to see him. His return would be an overwhelming defeat. He could never yield to it. . . . To see Emma? Go back to Emma, defeated? Emma had said that she would come to him when he should send. He had very little money. But he would take some of that money and buy a birth gift for the Connor baby. Nell Connor was a fine lady.

In Nell Connor's mind there was always a prayer, a hope, a plan to give her children a happy life and every advantage available; and she was happy now in spite of the "scourge" in anticipating one ambition—Sheila was going to be a teacher. Sheila's indifference, she interpreted as lack of appreciation due to youth. So during the late summer she worked patiently with the girl, questioning and repeating answers until it became monotonous to Danny.

"Gosh, Mom, I know the answers and the questions, too."

At which Sheila flashed her dark eyes, and Nell answered with a flourish of her arm: "Clear away out of here and, if it's that smart you are, hear Margaret with her Catechism."

Margaret on summer days was not in the mood for Catechism, so Danny climbed his corner tree or roved away with Cap at his heels, in search of gophers. To Danny his life on the prairie was purely existence, a time of physical growth preparatory to real life, which

would be experienced when he could get behind there where the sky cupped down, so grudgingly shutting the world out. Watching the horizon, he was filled with power and was confident in his own capabilities. He closed his fists firmly, holding there in his palm, as Ben had said, his future. While Cap wagged his tail and tried to interpret the seriousness in his master's face, Danny glanced from his calloused feet and tattered clothes back to the curtained sky. His wish was a vow: "When I get big. . . ."

Margaret, seated in a patch of wild sunflowers, settled disputes and gave advice to the colony of flowers with threats of grasshopper raids if they did not live in harmony.

Kitty Ann and Robert Emmet wished for many things.

"Most of all I want a room in my house just full of white bread," Kitty Ann usually began.

"Bread and 'lasses," added Robert Emmet.

"Yes, bread just soaked with molasses. And another room with lettuce and candy and other stuff, and when you opened the door out would roll a big, big head of cabbage."

And Ellen, squatting beside them, listened approvingly.

Nell often joined in what she called "building air castles."

As they gathered around the door at night, Robert Emmet usually began: "Tell us about when the grasshoppers go."

When the hoppers seemed to be thinning out, it was

not so presuming to speak of a railroad coming some day, a town, perhaps; but after a migratory swarm piled up three inches deep in the yard, air castles tottered perilously before Nell's swimming eyes.

"What if they stay all the time, Mom? What if they stay seven years?"

"Gosh, we'll all be old then," from Danny. "I'll be twenty years."

Nell answered: "They can't stay like that, children. There's a God over us."

CHAPTER XX

REPORTS that Indians were prowling about reached the Connors. Katto had been "over west" administering to a sick relative when Indians had come begging, and Katto had chased them off with her favorite weapon—the pitchfork.

Tim verified other rumors, too, and put his family on their guard. The settlers became alarmed. Children were warned about going far from the house; and old firearms which had been used in late years only for hunting were cleaned and equipped.

"You'd better take the gun, Tim, in the name of God," Nell suggested, truly worried. Indians in the face of everything else! "You have no protection from them at all on the prairie."

"What would I be wanting with that heavy musket? If any Indian gets near me I'll sell him one of me knives."

"Don't sell them to Indians," Kitty Ann cried in alarm. "They'll come and kill us with 'em."

"The gun is fixed up and loaded there,—there'll be hardly an occasion to use it. These prowling Indians are nothing new. Mostly old squaws and children. Men are busy in Dakota. They are deathly afraid of the soldiers at Fort Dodge. They run from any uniform, so they won't come much farther east. If need be, give them a little something and they'll go on. If you see them coming, get John over to be here with you," Tim advised, treating the matter lightly.

"John?" Danny repeated with disgust. "Gosh! Why, he's afraid of the grasshoppers; he'd hide from an Indian."

"You be the man of the house, then, Danny, and run them off," Tim said on leaving.

As Tim traveled from town to town, Nell and the children marched beside him; they were omnipresent. During the day when he was in conversation and contact with people, his family retreated tentatively; but at night they returned familiarly to his side. When overtaken on the prairie by fog and forced to await the stars or sun, he did not sleep. Instead he gazed into the dense fog, so symbolical of their present outlook. Tim knew that the fog must lift some time, but for the present it was there and he was lost. Night sounds were unduly harsh; night prowlers near—he could hear them swishing through the grass.

He thought of his many debts, the mortgage—grasshoppers, the winter, Indians. Nell had such a horror of Indians. In earlier days she had hidden the children when Indians passed. She had awakened him at night: "Listen! Tim, could that be Indians?" And old squaws and young ones were prowling about now to add more misery. Was Nell never to be free from Indians? Would Nell and the children ever have bare necessities? And she had never a complaint for herself, only a worry for the children. They were to have had comforts galore in the West. . . .

As Tim lay on the ground, he watched the fog lift. Stars came out like familiar friends. There was the big dipper, whose handle curved down protectingly in the

direction of home. His destination ofttimes lay in the opposite course.

Tim would stand up, adjust his pack, and continue his way convinced that better days were in store for them. If only they could hold out some way. . . .

One day during Tim's absence Danny sighted horses on the horizon. That evening the Connors learned that Indians, an old woman and a boy, had been at Max's; the boy held the horses while the squaw entered the house and pried around the kitchen for food. Max, on hearing of their arrival, got from his bed with difficulty. At sight of the grizzled man, the squaw ran toward the door, but Max intercepted her and standing on his "bad leg" he braced himself against the door jamb while with his "good leg" he accelerated her retreat.

As the Connors were eating their dinner of cornbread and milk a few days later, Kitty Ann pointed and yelled: *"Indians!"* They were in the yard. Two old women—each with a child behind her—riding two small, bony ponies, one of which was hitched to a travois. Several wolf-like dogs accompanied them. The women, dirty, wrinkled, and disheveled, entered the house and grabbed remnants of cornbread from the table. The young Connors secreted themselves under Mom's bed. Sheila stood by calmly, and Danny—where was Danny? One of the squaws spoke to the other, an older woman, and motioned to Nell's iron kettle.

As the older woman put the kettle in her sack, Nell stepped forward. "No, you can't have that," she said.

The old women guffawed; but their expressions of disdain changed to alarm when they noticed two blue trouser legs and a long blue coat with brass trimmings

appear on the rungs of the ladder. There were blue coat sleeves, too, but no hands, a freckled face and a blue cap —Danny in a soldier suit of blue. At sight of him the old woman forced the iron kettle from the bag and threw it on the floor. They ran from the house, climbed their horses, and followed by their gaunt dogs galloped away.

"I tell you, I put the run on 'em," Danny said proudly. He did not join in the following outburst of laughter, nor could he divine just what Nell meant when she said, with tears in her eyes, "Daniel, you are worthy to be the cousin to the captain who wore those clothes."

Indian fears became less disturbing as neighbors exchanged news of the simple manner in which the squaws were repulsed. Food was brought from secreted storerooms, and children resumed their roaming of the prairie.

One afternoon, as Sheila and Danny were taking the razor-back hogs out for a run, a young buck Indian suddenly stood directly in their path. Evidently he had been lying flat in the grass. Tall and lean as a weed, he towered formidably above the children; his chin was pointed, his nose slightly flat. His dress was a compromise between that of a settler and an Indian: jeans and shirt, moccasins, long hair in two braids bound into a turban around his head. Apparently finding delight in his present situation, he smiled, showing teeth white and even. His dark eyes were fixed on Sheila.

"Soldiers here?" he asked pleasantly.

"Soldiers?" Sheila repeated naïvely, fascinated by the tall, fearless man whose eyes were searching her own. "Soldiers."

"Hundreds of 'em," Danny broke in.

"Where?" he asked banteringly.

"Sleeping, I guess," Danny answered, "after their hard night." He knew that his voice quaked a little and that it was not convincing. He looked toward Sheila for help, but "she just stood there staring like a gawk."

The Indian's smile broadened to a grin, and he looked down at the boy curiously. Danny drew his body to its full height, but his frightened look betrayed him. He heard the Indian say: "Wild Goose will not harm pale face."

After another penetrating look at Sheila, the Indian asked again: "Soldiers here?"

And Sheila, her face transfigured in the first raptures of admiration, could not answer; but her mouth in some unaccountable way formed the word: "No-o."

"You live—?" he questioned, pointing toward Connors'.

Sheila nodded.

He stood for a moment with folded arms, appraising her. All at once he walked away and as quickly swung back. Picking a wild sunflower, he held it close to her hair, then shook his head. "You have more of sun than yellow flower. Wild Goose names you Sun-in-the-Hair," he said solemnly, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXI

WILD GOOSE lay somewhere in the grass as Danny, followed by Sheila, "put for home" and told Nell of the meeting.

"An Indian big as Pop, and I bet yuh there's hundreds more of 'em hiding around here; and I had to do all the talking. Sheila just stood there like a gawk."

Nell made the sign of the cross. "Between us and harm," she repeated, "between us and harm." She disregarded Danny and scrutinized Sheila, fearing lest she find any perceptible harm done by that dangerous contact.

The children were warned to stay close by the door. Danny was dispatched for Johann, and when he came he added more gloom to the already terrorized family.

"Indian can come," he said bitterly. "Indian can come and kill, kill." With a gesture he indicated the entire community. "Die quick better'n die slow."

"A shame it is for you, John," Nell reproved, her voice quaking a little. "A big, able-bodied fellow like you to be talking like that. If we all gave up what would ever become of the children or of the country or of anything else? Stay around here now, close, until we get the lay of the land. Other Indians may be hovering around. Tim will be along in a few days." She went to the bedroom and returned with jeans and a shirt of Tim's. "Here," she said, "is the change I had ready for Tim. Whip off them clothes and I'll wash and patch them

up." Johann, she knew, had other clothes which he was saving.

Obediently Johann repaired to the granary and returned with his bundle of clothes.

Nell bowed over the tub and lathered the clothes with a bar of home-made soap. Johann sat nearby with the children.

"Do you know that you're the only full-grown man around here for miles? You and Lou, Max's man. What with Max bedfast and the rest here and there trying to earn a dollar."

Johann made no comment.

Nell swung her body in unison with the rubbing. "Hear from Emma lately?"

Johann shook his head.

"Have you been practising up on the English reading? I have a few books that might ease your mind a bit."

He did not hear.

"Run, Margaret, and bring out *David Copperfield* for John. David had his troubles, too, and he came out all right."

When Margaret brought the tattered, fingered book, it was the children and not Johann who were aroused.

"*David Copperfield. David Copperfield.* Come on, Sheila, and read about David." They overpowered Margaret for possession of the book.

"Young ones!" Nell ceased rubbing, raised red, swollen hands from the strong suds and dried them on her apron. She rescued the book, adjusted its loose pages, and handed it to Johann. "It's torn a little, but there's not a word missing. Go off in the shade now, and read a while."

Johann roused himself, took the book, and dutifully walked toward the grove.

"Oh, John, I like it best when he's a little boy and people are mean to him." This from Kitty Ann.

And Margaret: "Didn't you cry, though, when Dora died?"

"He was foolish," Danny added. "I would have married Agnes in the first place."

"Danny, don't have matrimony bothering you now, but hear Margaret there with her Catechism. The Communion class will be going in a month and our lady'll be a fine numbskull. Kitty, keep your eye peeled around. Watch everywhere. Sheila, get your History and be studying." Nell wrung Johann's clothes from the suds. Her muscular arms were taut. As she shook up his garments and hung them on the line, she looked after the retreating Johann. She compared his chivalry and appearance on arriving in the country with his present sullenness and tatters. Hope had gone out from a young boy—hope was gone. "This country is enough to drive the hope and joy out of anybody except someone hard and calloused like myself. And sometimes I feel it had me, too. . . ." The same scene confronted her: blue summer sky, barren prairie, shiny hoppers, Indians lurking close like snakes in the grass.

Tim's homecoming brought its usual cheer. "The Indians are too busy across the line to bother with settlers," he said. "This young buck is probably someone just passing through." He told how everyone in the surrounding towns was excited about the fall election. The Dutch had a candidate of their own now for Represen-

tative, and the Germans were parading with signs: *Down with the Dutch.* "I am going to stop at home a while longer this time." At this information the children, delighted, mobbed him. They clung to his hands and swung their weight from his long legs. He was patient with them and continued, "I'm going with the oxen to the county seat tomorrow. I'm in hopes of getting a little loan there."

"I go to town with you," Johann announced, "and get a birth gift for the little one."

"Don't bother with that, John, but go along for the trip. It will do you good. Buy yourself something and get as much enjoyment out of the day as you can," was Nell's advice.

Johann accompanied Tim on his trip next day. It was noon when they reached the town. To all outward appearances the little cluster of drab shanties baking in the sun had little semblance to a capital; yet here, without trees or setting, squatted down on the prairie, was a county seat. A winding, black-rutted road bordered by frame buildings, their boarded battlements proclaiming the dealers' names and wares: Old Nic's Place, a saloon owned by Nic Hill, who lived in the rear; a bank with a modest sign: Loans; a General Store which held all the necessities of life, from copper-toed boots to ginger snaps. Frail and impermanent as this town appeared, its buildings scarcely able to withstand a strong gust of wind, here were experienced daily the most crucial tests of human sympathy, endurance, and avarice.

People came to this town to try to borrow money at any rate of interest on their land, with which to buy food and shaker flannel. Incidentally, they asked for

their mail; their kinsmen were impatient with their repeated requests for help, and seldom wrote. In the General Store, women looked hungrily at the dried apricots behind glass cases; while over at the loan office their husbands gravely signed away milch cows or sewing machines.

Johann had trouble in selecting a birth gift for the baby. He thought seriously while he scanned the shelves. Nothing there for a baby of Nell Connor's. He thought of a fine necklace he had, an heirloom of his mother. He would give that to the baby.

"Treat the whole family," the clerk was saying. "Take along a jug of whiskey. Good for the baby, good for the mother, good for snake bites. Always keep a little in the house." His tone was confidential now. "Have you had breaking fever yet? No? Well, whiskey will cure 'ager.' "

Johann bought some whiskey.

Not quite sure that he had spent his money profitably, he put his jug in the wagon and climbed up to the seat. In his search for a suitable gift he was impressed by the sordidness of the town, and he was anxious to get out of it. Tim soon took his place beside him; and their wagon and a few others struck out their diverse ways, while the loan men sat about like cats who fed on canaries, speculating as to where foreclosures would be easy.

The county seat sank once more into the lap of the prairie, and the horizon above it took on again a fixity. Tim, after a few swigs at the jug, grew loquacious. His experience with the loan shark became a jocular one. Over and over it was repeated, with increasing mirth.

"Yes sir, yes sir," he reiterated, bringing his hand down heavily on Johann's knee. "Yes sir, when I said that I had a good farm and fine machinery, the hawk-nosed loan man handed over that money meeker than a kitten."

Johann smiled grimly. He was reminded of the heavily fed bodies of his father's friends, who no doubt would have to be drowned in spirits before they would become affected by them.

Tim became jubilant. He orated and sang and orated again.

Finally his hilarity waned. . . . He grew pensive—unusual for Tim.

Johann was depressed.

When they arrived at his shanty, Johann asked Tim to stop for a moment. Racing inside he searched out his mother's necklace and brought it with him to the Connors' home.

"I can't take this treasure for the baby," Nell protested, as she opened the satin-lined jewel case. "You keep it. It was your mother's. It is too valuable, too good. . . ."

"No, no," Johann answered, his eyes growing moist. "Nothing is too good. . . ."

"Well, I'll keep it for you, John."

Later when he presented the jug of whiskey with the clerk's recommendations, she smiled and said, "We'll have a party and have the neighbors in. It will cheer them up a bit. You must come over, too, John."

"I will come," he answered.

The Connors had the party the next week. On the afternoon preceding the night, Pete Schwartz stopped

at Johann's enroute from town. He had a letter for Johann, and after delivering it he loitered about the place. Pete wished to ascertain, if possible, the size of the jug that was to be drained that evening; and furthermore, if opportunity permitted, he planned to tell Johann to make the next treat a keg of beer.

Johann read his letter in the shade of the house, and after a careful rereading of the fine script he raised his eyes, hoping to find solace somewhere about him. The sky was blue and guileless, the prairie brown and barren, the sun mercilessly hot. He looked at Pete—perhaps *he* could tell him what to do. The complacent smile on the boy's leathery face he interpreted as leering curiosity. Johann hastened to his shack and barred the door.

What could he do? What should he answer? Emma was growing tired of waiting, and Emil was pressing his attentions more and more. She complained that all the other girls her age were married and had babies already. He must tell her again how people were starving. He must explain more fully. He must—but how? Hadn't he told her all that already? His head brushed the rope which dangled from the scantling—*there* was one escape.

He dashed away from the rope, away from the shanty, out to the buffalo wallow, and took his usual seat. He gave no thought to supper. The sunset was tinging the world with yellow. He watched its changes in detail, as one who views a loved thing for the last time. He recalled his first night on the prairie, its wonder, its beauty, its charm. His flaming hopes and ambitions now reduced to ashes. Everything was false, was wrong, in the world! Herman loved Sheila . . . He loved Emma . . . and now she would never come. It

would never be. Just as well! She didn't belong here. It was over. She could stay where there was plenty to eat. She was an old-country girl. Placidly, the moon anchored itself over Connors' corner tree. The prairie took on its witching shadows—shadows that seemed to listen to his thoughts, cowardly thoughts that he did not want, could not want.

The new country had deceived him, trapped him. He had burned all his incense to false gods. Even now false gods stalked through the darkness, grasping. Why not end it all? . . . Why not the rafter and the swinging rope? There was no one to grieve. The little community formed an impregnable wall of defense around him. They also shared his misfortunes—all of them—Nell Connor . . . yes, he had promised Nell Connor that he would attend a party tonight. What use now! What for parties? There was nothing, nothing. Nothing in the old country, nothing in this country. There must be a place for him in some country. Was there perhaps *another?* Here this would go on forever. He could not endure it any longer. Seeing the sun rise each day on a world of desolation, coursing its way through a guileless sky, unmindful of the greed and hunger in its path. Night, in its mockery, hiding the tortures of the day. "Not right, not right." Hungry people . . . Prairie chickens, tame and inactive, their bodies fat from the slimy bodies of hoppers . . . Coyotes, in their turn, with sleek, shiny coats.

It was not to any impatience in himself, or to Emma's exigencies, but to the prairie that Johann attributed his loss. It was the *prairie!*

When he thought of his delivery from the place, he

experienced a sense of relief. Life here would go on the same. Always there would be the Connors, staying, trusting in God: the Emmas, demanding; yes, the Emils; the loan sharks—thieves: always himself, the fool—no good in Germany—a greenhorn here; always that escape. . . . Was it calling? No, that was Danny.

"Mom said to come right over. We're having the party now."

Johann followed Danny, who bounded ahead like a rabbit.

"Look out, John," he called back over his shoulder, "don't let them big devil's darning-needles light on yuh. They'll sew your ears shut."

Mechanically, Johann struck at the glistening dragonflies that darted about him.

That was lively music coming to him from the lighted house. Tim had the flute, and someone he did not know had the fiddle. Mrs. Connor was moving about briskly, like one who had not forgotten the dancing of her girlhood.

Just so, Johann recalled, the officers in the army had celebrated when the enemy was near.

In an adjoining room, Sheila was hearing the children with their prayers:

"There are four corners on my bed. . . ."

The fiddler, "a stranger going through the country," changed the tempo of the dance. After a jig he was playing a waltz—*Auf Wiedersehen*. Young and old responded by drawing their feet toward their ankles. Max's girls, three of them, and the wife of Max were there. Mary was home with her father. It was an occasion for Lou Hoppe, the hired man, to swing the pretty

Lena about. Katto and her boys were there, joining in the dance, in laughter and in argument. Some of the Hollanders were there. They did not dance but were content to watch the rest. One tall boy in wooden shoes stood outside and watched Annie, the youngest daughter of Max, through the window as she ranged about in the crowd, putting herself in the way of a partner. When Sheila and Herman collected the younger crowd in the yard for games, the tall Hollander left the window and joined in the play.

Johann stood hesitatingly for a moment before the door. This would go on, on—he slunk back into the dusk. Turning, he ran as if pursued toward the shanty, to the solace of the dangling rope.

CHAPTER XXII

PETE DUNN produced a bottle of vinegar bitters and passed it around: he tuned up the fiddle again and began a polka. There was promise of a very merry evening. Max's Lena and the hired man stole off into the night for a mutual kiss. Grasshopper plagues and their aftermaths? There was a moon . . . and a future.

"Come, Danny." Nell appeared in the doorway. "Come, run and get John. Tell him I'm having a hard time saving a nip for him, and we need him bye and bye to fill a quadrille."

"Ah, Mom, I was over there once; and he came over. Let Sheila go now. I've just got out of being 'it' and I want to play."

"I'll go meself," Nell said, using Tim's expression. "Come along, Katto, and we'll march John back here."

"I go," Katto consented.

The sound of music and play followed the women as they went on to their neighbor's quarter section.

Johann was not sitting on the stone, but one glance in the moonlighted cabin showed his dangling body. The women paused, but only long enough to realize fully what their eyes beheld. There was no hesitation in the face of duty.

"Quick, Katto, a knife! Where's his butcher knife? We may save him."

They got him down—they never remembered just how—but Nell's knowledge of resuscitation was meagre

and her strength, moreover, was failing her. Katto hurried across the field calling loudly for help. The dancers did not hear; those at play did not heed—it was only Katto, shouting and carrying on.

Quite out of breath, the pudgy figure filled the lighted doorway. "Hey! Greenhorn is dead!" One hand clutched Tim's shoulder, the other fastened itself in Dutch Fred's long whiskers. She would make them heed. "By Gutt, I am not making fun. The greenhorn hung himself up by the neck. Come, dumb fools, and help Nell Connor put the breath in him again."

Tim and Dutch Fred disengaged themselves from Katto's frenzied grip and ran toward Johann's. The fiddler had jumped down from his station on the table, and was already at the door. Soon the entire party unseeingly tramped on each other's attenuating shadows, hurrying to the scene. Katto trotted along silently.

Tim reached the shanty first. "Any hope of bringing him to?" he asked of Nell in the doorway.

"He's gone," she answered.

Katto broke the quiet of the eerie room by bringing down imprecations upon the girl in Germany. Tearing Emma's picture from its frame, she nailed it on the door, making it serve as head to the enormous grasshopper of Herman's drawing; vowing that such a countenance would scare away the hoppers.

Pete Dunn, "the stranger passing through the country," was greatly moved by the tragic story of the unhappy German boy. "I'll take him to town in my wagon," he said; but Tim protested.

"No, we'll take care of him; we'll wake him right here in this house—it's more like home to him."

To this all agreed. Then Jake Van den Hull, spokesman for a group of Hollanders, said: "We make the coffin."

"I got candles from my brother in Dubuque," Max's wife spoke up. She had been crying and controlled her voice with difficulty. "I go get them. Johann he will not have a poor man's wake."

Many of the guests remained. It seemed to Nell, who went to her home to administer to baby Alice, that people were stirring about the Connor premises and wandering back and forth on the prairie until long after midnight. After Alice was asleep, she took the lamp to the loft room and searched out two heavy silver candlesticks, heirlooms in the Powers family, and carried them with her when she went in the early hours of the morning to take up her vigil with Katto, the wife of Max, Tim, Van den Hull, and Dutch Fred, who were staying throughout the night.

When Nell crossed the field, the rumbling of distant wagons was the only sound in the calm of the night. There were no dark figures stalking now. Nell knew that she was alone; yet she felt a presence.

"Poor John, may the Lord have mercy upon his soul. Too bad he took his own life. He's had his Purgatory on earth. . . . This prairie is worse than Purgatory. May the Lord receive his poor soul!"

As she lingered a moment on the step of the cabin for the cool, refreshing breeze to ease the fatigue in her eyes, a star shot across the sky, carrying in its wake a trail of light.

"A soul just went to Heaven," she announced from

the doorway. "It passed right over the big stone where John used to sit and watch the sky."

There was no comment. The wife of Max, who was passing her knotted fingers over the beads of her rosary, meekly raised her eyes.

Later in the morning, when Nell returned to take up the duties in her own house, there were tired lines in her face; and her hair, loosed from its coil, hung down her back. "I declare the house seems strange to me," she said as she bathed her face in cold water and began rattling stove lids. "I've been through so much yesterday, and it isn't over yet. A funeral now. Poor John. I wonder if there's anything I left undone for that boy. Poor lad. May his soul rest in peace."

The neighborhood—Germans, Luxemburgers, Hollanders—turned out; and with the very simplest of rites Johann was laid to rest beside Bennie and the others. Accounts of his death were sent to Emma and his father. Emma did not reply; but his father wrote a scathing letter in which he accused Connor and people like him of coaxing young men into the country and then starving them.

"The back of me head to that fellow," Tim remarked. "He's nothing but a big-headed and big-bellied tyrant. We shouldn't have written at all, at all."

"'Twas our duty, Tim, whatever; and if I had it to do over again I would have written to him long ago and implored him to send money and Emma to that poor boy."

CHAPTER XXIII

"WHENEVER anyone hangs himself in a house, or gets killed there, that house is haunted." So Danny told the younger Connors. "The ghost never leaves the place. It wants revenge."

The children, with Herman Schwartz, were sitting before the Connors' door one evening. Tim had gone away again. They were lonely, and appreciated Herman's company.

Herman and Danny had been speaking of many things. They had spoken of their future: Herman was going to be an artist, and Danny had said: "Some day I'm going to leave the prairie, too." The conversation had shifted to Johann—the Connors had been told to forget his death, to cease speaking of it—but Herman had begun it, so the tragedy was quite thoroughly reviewed again. This led up to Danny's telling about the ghost of Johann.

Robert Emmet cuddled up close to Margaret as Danny argued: "And I can prove it, too. His ghost is there. I'll call it and it will answer."

Sheila glanced sideways at Danny. His look challenged her—she said nothing. Herman looked at Sheila and smiled his wise smile. Danny stepped out from the group and ceremoniously traced a circle around himself on the ground. He wildly ran his fingers through his brown hair. Danny's hair was always tousled and usually very long. Only at rare intervals was it trimmed.

It stood on end now—there was nothing unusual about that!

His audience was waiting, eager to become excited.

Danny squinted his eyes, drew his body up erect as he imagined conjurers did, gave a shift to his jeans, adjusted his home-made suspenders, whirled about three times, and cupped his hands around his mouth.

An anatomist watching him in this ceremony would have been conscious of joints—hinge joints, elbow joints.

"Jo-han-n-n," he called out.

"Jo-han-n-n," came a hollow reply from the empty prairie.

"Are you green where you are now, Johan-n?"

"Are now Johan-n?"

"Good thing if you a-r-e."

"You a-r-e. . . ."

"See." Danny swung around. "Didn't I tell yuh?" Danny's jaw seemed loose jointed as he grinned. His dark blue eyes flashed: they appeared black.

Robert Emmet was completely under the spell, but Kitty Ann spoke out boldly: "He didn't answer yuh, Danny. He just mocked yuh."

"Well, maybe he's in a place where they only allow him to mock. You must remember he hung himself."

"Oh, I know something that will scare better as that," Herman boasted. "I saw that Injun that's been around here. I saw him today."

The Indian around here yet? The children sat erect as he related as casually as was possible for fidgety Herman:

"I was hiding in grass never thinking of nothing. I

was holding snare over gopher hole. That Injun just got up from grass near me. I never knew he was there. He had gopher in his snare. I follow him. I stay down in grass, but he walk along just like anyone. Pete he see him lots o' times. I want to see what he does. And he goes to crick, start a fire there, roast that gopher and eat it."

"Oh," the children said in chorus.

"Eat a gopher?" It was Danny's turn to be incredulous.

"Eat it," Herman repeated, drawing his legs up under him importantly.

As the children saw Nell coming from the cowyard, they cried out: "The Indian is around here yet, and Herman saw him eat a gopher."

Nell placed her pail of foamy milk up in the wagon box. "Where is he, Herman?" she asked in alarm as she joined the group.

Encouraged, Herman was unusually voluble. "First I see him not so far from Johann's, then I see him by the crick. Pete he say he cut off his hair and hit himself with it until there was no more hair. We see him lots of times."

Nell moved close to Herman. "Why didn't you tell us he was around here? We never see him."

"We think you know it. We see him lots of times."

"Where was Pete when he saw him lash himself with his hair? Did he say anything to Pete?"

"Pete he was hunting some meat. Pete was hungry for meat, and our meat was all. We have nothing for the gun, so Pete dig a hole and hide in there. You know, prairie chickens always come to look what for black pile

of dirt is doing there, and Pete he grabs them by the legs. You know how, Danny—you do it, too."

"Yes, we know how to catch chickens, but was it while Pete was in the 'hide' that he saw the Indian? Was it far from here?"

"Oh, not so far. Over by the crick. Pete he was in the hole and he saw Injun come to the crick and make as though he was going to take a drink. After he look into the water once he don't drink no water, he takes out a knife, cuts off his braids of hair and whips, just whips his self. Pete say maybe he's mad over himself that he is Injun."

"I hope he keeps his distance," was Nell's comment. "Maybe he'll steal my candlesticks from John's shanty. They're there since the wake. I wouldn't want to lose them. Most of my people were laid out with those candlesticks at their head. Run over and get them, some of you."

"I go," Herman volunteered: "I and Sheila."

"All right," Nell said, rising, "and Danny, come before it's too dark and help me finish up the chores. That Indian's mind may not be right. We'll have to report his hanging around. Lashing himself with his hair! I never heard of the like. East or West." Then, seeing alarm in the children's faces, she added: "Oh, he is probably harmless. Be going in now and getting ready for bed."

Sheila was taller than Herman. As she walked beside him, her two heavy braids of hair tapped against her shoulders, and her smooth ankles slipped through the

grass. Her dark eyes were fixed beyond Herman, although she listened to his prattle.

"And we got such a book at home with white pages in it, and I make your picture there, Sheila, but it does not look like you." Herman had a roundness of body: his head was round, his face, his eyes. Only when he smiled and squinted could one notice any acuteness of feature or of perception. Herman was no neater than other boys of his community, but his grime was uniform and added somewhat to his general roundness of physiognomy. Tim often said: "Herman's layers are even."

The two children did not linger in Johann's shanty. Each grabbed a candlestick and hastened toward the door, but there they stood too terrified to move. A figure, a man, coming suddenly out of the twilight, was before them.

"I take now," he said, calmly grasping Sheila in his arms.

"The Injun!" Herman cried out.

"She not your squaw. She Sun-in-the-Hair."

Sheila struggled in his arms. She could not see his face, but his voice was that of the Indian on the prairie. Recalling Mom's warnings and horrors: "Herman, help me!" She used her fists, to no avail.

The Indian seemed to be enjoying the situation as he had on the former meeting. "In a trap, but not wounded," he said as he attempted to carry her away bodily.

For just an instant Herman was incapable of action. The recalling of Johann's death in the shanty, and now this struggle before him, were too tense for his slow perception.

"Herman!"

Sheila's appeal aroused him to action. Sheila was being carried away by the Injun! Herman raised the candlestick with both hands and from his point of vantage on the cabin steps brought the piece of silver down heavily on the assailant's head.

The Indian swayed and fell. Sheila was free.

For an instant the children stood, too excited to move. Herman wished to drag Sheila away, but instead she bowed over the recumbent figure. "Oh, it's the same one."

"Same one?"

"Yes, and his hair is cut. Now he's dead."

"Yes, and now they make me dead, too," Herman said in tears. "I run. I run away. I run away now. Injuns might get me. Soldiers might get me. I run away."

Both children ran, first toward Connors': then Herman stopped suddenly, swung around, and dragged Sheila a few rods toward his own home. Each still carried a candlestick, and Herman held fast to Sheila's wrist. Sheila pulled her hand away. "Come on—tell Mom," she commanded. "I don't want to go to your house."

"I don't, neither," Herman answered, still clinging to Sheila. Herman was trembling.

"Leave go my hand," Sheila said, "or I'll hit you with the candlestick. I'm going home. What if he ain't dead? He'll get after us."

Herman loosened his vise-like grip on Sheila's wrist. "I go away, Sheila. I go now. I all time want for to be artist. I go now for to be artist. I go first to my uncle in Dakota. Injuns will not find me. When they get tired of

looking for me, I will be, oh, fine artist, and I will grow, oh, such big whiskers and come back and we'll get married."

"Oh, Herman. . . ."

Herman had started west. "Good-bye, Sheila. I go for to be artist," came to her from the darkness.

It was Danny who brought the news of the attempted abduction to Nell. He had met Sheila on the edge of the grove.

"Glory be to God," Nell said, holding Sheila securely in her arms. "Tell me one thing: are you all right?"

Danny was already on Ned's back to summon Katto and son, Pete. They appeared in a short time, also on horseback, Pete with the butcher knife and Katto dangling a pitchfork. Nell, with the clothesline in her hand, joined them. All cautiously made their way towards the ill-fated shanty.

In case of encounter, Katto was ready, weapon in hand. It was not called into action. The Indian lay as he had fallen.

"We'd better bind him, hand and foot, in the name of God," Nell advised, "in case he comes to. There's a pulse, Katto. Herman need not have run away."

Nell knotted the rope firmly.

"Oh, don't think on Herman now," Katto said lightly. "He'll come back once when he gets hunger. Let him hide. We got enough dead ones around here these days. This one is dead, I think."

But the Indian was not dead. As Nell leaned over him, he stirred and moaned. "Thank God, he's not

dead," she said. "I wouldn't want Herman to be a murderer protecting Sheila."

Danny spoke up. "It's the same Indian, Mom. Got his hair cut, and wearing a sash."

The Indian, quite unconscious, and bleeding from a scalp wound, was placed in Johann's bed. Nell applied cold compresses to his head. Why, if he should die . . . !

Pete, who had been summoned to Max's for Lou, returned with only the wife of Max.

"I come," Max's wife said with emotion. "Max he will not leave Lou come; he does not want it that anything shall happen Lou—Lou must work the place. He says he don't care if I come, so I come right away with Pete. You got much trouble, Mrs. Connor, here; I stay now, and Katto will stay. You got such a little baby yet. . . ."

"The baby'll be all right; they can come for me when she cries. I'll stay by this villain. Why, if he should die . . . !" She whispered: "Think of the revenge." She changed the compresses, cringing a little at the contact with coarse hair. *Indian.*

Pete was dismissed with the order to ride over for Dutch Fred. Danny was sent home; the wife of Max, accompanying him, said: "I can do nothing here now, so I will see how that little baby is once. You got Katto with you; I will watch out for that baby."

It was a long night for Nell Connor. Katto snored in her chair. The pitchfork fell from her hand. Nell felt quite alone, cut off from life, in a world where she had never been before. It was strange. . . . Before her was an unconscious Indian, bound hand and foot. . . . It

was ridiculous somehow. . . . She guarding the Indian, Katto guarding her. It was a nightmare, surely, so strange, so impossible. Yet, here was Johann's little house . . . his intimate possessions—his pipe on the ledge of a two-by-four, his thoughts . . . his despair. And, too, the little shelf that Bennie Hurd had so crudely constructed. . . . The Hurds—Bennie; all were with her here . . . but she was alone. Tim, the man whom she had married in a period so remote that it was a dream world, a memory—was peddling ware to secure food. . . . Hardware that was made back there in Northampton . . . the cutlery with the wicked eyes that had caught the sunlight each morning as she went to school with other little girls in clean aprons and freshly-made curls . . . they had squinted back at the cutlery's eyes, but it seemed superior standing there so tall when they were so very tiny. . . . At times when she drove to school with her father in the carriage when he was going to make a call on old Mrs. Leeney who was bedfast, she had got even with the cutlery: she could roll past it, and it was forced to stand still forever . . . now it was packing hardware and sending it here for Tim to sell. . . . Had there ever really been a Northampton, a cutlery, an opera house? . . . Jenny Lind coming to sing . . . the town turning out to hear her. . . . Nell walking up the steps, one hand in her father's big hand, one hand clasping her mother's. . . . Did those things ever happen really? . . . Her mother . . . Did her mother know that her daughter had come to the West? . . . did she know what the West was? . . . Did the dead know? . . . Nell hoped that they did not know all. . . . Did her mother know of that

houseful of small children? . . . She hoped so. . . . Nell's children . . . little souls, little minds, little hearts, little bodies for whose well-being she was responsible . . . they were being tended now by a strange, kind woman whose life was valued not at all . . . a strange world. . . . Night sounds. . . . Why did young wolves yelp so sharply? . . . If their cries were not so penetrating . . . and owls, would they never cease! . . . "Who-ho-ho-hoo. . . ." Owls and Schwartzes' hounds. . . .Which were the owl sounds? . . . Were the baying hounds attacking young wolves? . . . Did owls never grow weary? . . . Grasshoppers hurling their bodies against the small window pane like spirits tossing handfuls of putty. . . . Katto's discordant snoring—the raucous gyrating of train wheels moving westward, intermingled with the purr of the old millrace near the box factory. . . . Nell felt a kinship with the Indian, bound, insensible to real life. . . . Living . . . dreaming in a world that could not possibly be reality. . . . The young wolves were not yelping now; the owls, too, were still. Where had Herman gone? . . . Dutch Fred would be coming soon. . . . Nell was bound to the strange prairie: she was part of it, influencing other lives, becoming affected by others. This was the West. The East, Bay State, was irrevocable, never to be lived again save for snatches in the Limbo between sleeping and waking; or when Reality, engrossed in the business of devising afflictions, would allow memory to slip in unnoticed and sprinkle a mitigating hyssop. Reality—jailer, faithful to his post —was back again.

. . . . . .

Johann's lamp wick was poorly trimmed; it sputtered as it disclosed an injured Indian. He had tried to carry Sheila away! Why did she change those applications so painstakingly? Her spirit rebelled, but her hands worked automatically, wringing out the cloths and placing them on forehead and head. Sheila was unharmed! Sheila was safe! God was good.

At dawn she brought fresh water, washed the blood from the Indian's face, and resumed her vigil. She thought she saw a sign of consciousness—or was it merely a flicker of the daylight that was dancing on counterpane, on his face, everywhere? His eyelids raised, and she caught the bewildered eye of a young man upon her. She stood over him. He tried to raise a hand—Nell untied his hands. He raised one feebly, indicating a drink. She gave him water and continued looking down at him.

He was handsome, yes, but his beauty was not of the chiseled Indian type; it was rather one of imperfections. His upper lip was too full and his nose was broad, but the skin was smooth and tan. His race was forgotten. He was injured, a foolish boy, perhaps, but injured. There was a childish curl to his upper lip, and his chin was pointed like Danny's. Nell untied his feet. "He wouldn't harm us," she decided, "his eyes are too meek." And she roused Katto to see the improvement in the patient.

CHAPTER XXIV

DUTCH FRED nursed the Indian for a few days, leaving him only to tend his stock. The neighborhood decided that the lad should be arrested and taken away; but to this Dutch Fred would not agree.

"You talk with him once," he told Nell, who was most concerned about his speedy removal. Dutch Fred was serious; he nodded his head. "You find out. I am sorry for such a boy. He got funny things in his head."

"He's not right," Nell replied. "All the more reason he should be looked after. He may kill us all. An Indian is bad enough in his right senses—"

"Oh, no, not that way. I don't mean crazy," Dutch Fred interrupted. "I don't know how you say it, but he got such funny thoughts in his head. I cannot the Injun thoughts very well. Now I can the English thoughts right away when you and Tim come; they are like the German thoughts; but the Injun thoughts I cannot very well." The settler stroked his long beard and lowered his eyelids. "His grandmother is white woman. And he don't want to fight white mans."

"What about grabbing Sheila to carry her off? What has he to say to that?"

"He won't do that no more. He all time is sorry now. He say that was the Injun in him. He will be white man now."

"You never can tell what he'll be. Some of them are

pretty crafty." But Nell could not convince Dutch Fred of the Indian's treachery.

"I like that boy," he went on. "No need for scare. I all time do right by you. I don't want you to have trouble. Here is some salve. He will come here and you must put it on his head, so that bad stuff don't go to the brain. This salve is good salve. I put it on horses' shoulders."

Nell knew that Dutch Fred was sincere, but she feared the Indian. She hoped that he would disappear.

One morning he stood before her door, smiling.

"Food? You want food?" Nell asked.

"No. No food. Wild Goose knows here is Kind Woman and Sun-in-the-Hair. You—Kind Woman," he said, and turned away.

His scalp wound required dressing, so Nell called to him and applied the salve.

Few words were exchanged, as Nell used every art of which she had ever heard, so that he would get well and be off out of sight. She had no personal fear of him now, still his presence made her uneasy, since he so boldly admired Sheila.

Sheila herself retained her usual passivity during this ordeal, never speaking her thoughts, hardly giving the impression that she had an opinion on the matter. She smiled, she frowned, she listened, she obeyed. She did not show less interest in her books, but she appeared less keen. She planned her salary with Nell, she agreed that some money should be saved for herself and that the rest should be borrowed and used by the Connors—they would pay interest.

Nell bided her time, waiting for the Indian to dis-

appear. He was like the snow in winter, the grasshoppers, and other plagues; he would disappear in time. She thanked God that one of her dreams was about to be realized—Sheila would be a teacher! This thought made her jubilant, and forgetting immediate cares she added addition after addition to her air castle. Sheila would be teaching this winter; and surely next year there would be a crop.

"We'll have a top buggy some day," she would say, "and a team of grays, and we'll drive all over the country and visit the towns that Pop is visiting now. People will say: 'There go the Connors.' "

"And I'll be driving," Danny added.

"And we'll all be going to meet Sheila, who will be coming back from school in the East."

"Grasshoppers won't put the sun out all the days," Robert Emmet added, knowing that the realization of their wonderful chariot depended on just that.

"They'll leave us, please God, before another harvest." And as Nell, pulse throbbing, dreaded to think of what they would do if the hoppers did not leave, she started their conversation in another channel with: "Wonder what Pop'll have for us the next time he comes."

Wild Goose often slipped into the group as they sat out in the evening. They did not fear him any more. He sat apart from the white family, his knees drawn up under his chin, his hands clasped about his legs. Dutch Fred had shaved his head in the region of the scar, and had trimmed his hair in much the fashion of a settler.

One night Kitty Ann stole boldly over near the silent

spectator. "You wouldn't steal white childer, would you? You wouldn't scalp me and make my curls all bloody, would you?"

"No," he answered, "Wild Goose harms no one. Wild Goose is no wolf." He moved near the group, not rising but propelling his body along the ground with his feet.

He spoke at length, and as he related his story in his deep, musical voice, he looked beyond his listeners, his eyes fixed on the distance as if he saw there in panorama that which he was relating.

His grandmother had been a white woman. She was loved by a chief and lived in happiness with his people. When old, she became ill. His grandfather carried her back to her people to see "good medicine man." She recovered and asked to be taken back to the Indians, but her people said never would they let her go back. In the spring she began to fail again and spoke often of her husband and children—Wild Goose, especially, was beloved by her. . . . One morning when the trees were shooting forth green leaves and spring scents filled the air, she could remain no longer; she disappeared, traveling east instead of west, to elude her people. She picked up with movers headed west who were afraid of Indians. She promised them a safe trip, and they carried her as far as Big Muddy. "One night, I remember, I was raised from my bed. Someone kissed me, with tears on her face. It was my grandmother."

"Did she live long after coming back?" Nell asked while all the children were leaning forward to hear more.

"No, she didn't live long after that, but she was

happy to die in the sight of the hills, and with her children. She asked that her body be interred, and it was as she wished. Old chief soon followed."

"And your mother?"

"My mother I do not know. She died when I was like the papoose," pointing to Alice. "My mother was Indian. I was cared for by my grandmother. I went away to Mission School. I did not care for school. When I returned to my own people, I was not happy. I could not be a brave, for I would not war against the palefaces. I went from home. I walk away from the reservation. I cross the river. I come here. I am—" he said, turning his face to Nell, the white spot shaven on his head uncanny in the darkness of his hair. "I am—Wild Goose does not know what he is. With Indian he is not Indian. With White he is not White. I belong—nowhere." He smiled, reconciled, boyishly shrugging his shoulders. "I am Wild Goose."

Followed a silence, a harsh silence. There was something about the Indian boy as he related his life that was poignantly sad. His tale, coupled with the musical quality of his voice, surrounded him with a charm that was felt even by the smaller children.

Nell's words and tone were flat. "I'm glad you're a Christian. You pray, don't you? I suppose you know your prayers?"

"I pray, and the Great Spirit is pleased with my prayers. My prayer is of the white people. It leads me to the white people." Looking happily at Sheila, he continued: "Her eye does not tell me, but in my heart and with my eye I know that a paleface will be my squaw."

"The Lord save us!" Nell said under her breath,

her old fear returning: but he was speaking now of something else, in response to the children's repeated: "You won't carry white childer away."

"No, the Great Spirit is not pleased with such, and punishes. Wild Goose will not carry away a paleface. But he will pray to the Great White Spirit, and will learn how to take a paleface in the white man's way."

Danny, not quite so overcome with mixed emotion as the others were, spoke out rudely: "If you want a white girl, why don't yuh go over to Steindlers and ask one of them girls? They're crazy to get married to anyone. They can't find a soul for Mary. Maybe one of them will marry you."

Wild Goose did not respond. Instead, he looked at Danny with the same smile that was so humiliating at their first meeting on the prairie.

Danny stood up and turned defensively toward Sheila. "Sheila is going to be a teacher and go away off back East to school. Maybe she'll never get married, and surely not—"

"Danny," Nell broke in, alarmed. "Be careful what you say. Go on in out of here and hear Margaret with her Catechism."

Danny arose and said half under his breath but distinct enough so that all heard: "That's humbug about his being at Mission School. And I wonder if all that other—" Nell was grateful to hear the slam of the door. She turned toward Wild Goose with a gracious smile.

"I guess we'll be going in now," in a tone of dismissal. She shook up drowsy children.

"No, no," they chorused, "we want to hear Wild Goose."

"Some other time. Go in now and I'll go down to see if that stray hatcher and her chicks got settled for the night. The coyotes are getting terribly bold."

"Sheila! Sheila, put Ellen to bed and then be combing the snarls from your hair." Wild Goose disappeared without ceremony. Sheila jumped, aroused from reverie.

Nell protected the hen and chicks against possible prowlers, then stood watching into the night. 'Twas a strange world! Poor Tim perhaps on his way home. Poor Herman, just a little child off there in the world trying to be an artist. Poor Johann! She would always treasure that necklace he gave Alice. May the Lord rest his soul! Poor Danny, worried because Wild Goose saw beauty in Sheila. She must warn Danny not to provoke him to wrath. "Lord knows what he'd do. Poor fellow seems torn in two between the two races."

She stumbled over a prostrate body and would have fallen headlong were the recumbent figure not so nimble. He recovered his feet and averted her fall. It was Wild Goose.

"See," he pointed, much pleased. "See! The moon cannot take the sun from her hair."

Nell's feeling was at first one of repulsion. How dare an Indian!—how dare anyone! lie in the grass and watch Sheila brush her hair? With the light of the lamp upon it, her hair was truly golden; and this Indian, as well as anyone else who had eyes, could not help but admire. She must bide her time and be patient with this annoyance.

As she walked toward the house, a terrible forebod-

ing seized her. What if he attempted to carry Sheila off? Was there ever going to be an end to miseries? She'd have Sheila sleep with her, and if anyone dared to alarm her—"between us and harm"—she'd kill him.

At the door she heard Danny's voice, impatient. "Now I'll ask yuh the ones you missed last night. 'Is God good to us?' "

Margaret answered tearfully: " 'God *is* good to us; He gives us many blessings because He loves us.' "

" 'Is God merciful?' "

" 'God *is* merciful . . .' I know He *is*, but I don't know why."

"God is merciful, children. That's enough for tonight. Now, we must always remember He's merciful, even when we can't tell why."

CHAPTER XXV

THE next day Katto came to the Connors' carrying herself with an attempt at dignity. Her prodigiously plump figure was crammed into a tight basque and skirt; her chin proper was raised somewhat from her accessory chin; and her head slightly elevated caused the pug nose to become decidedly more pug. She produced a grimy letter and handed it to Nell with a hand none too clean, flopping herself into the proffered chair.

"From Herman," she said.

As Nell read the fine Spencerian script with its lavish scrolls and shadings, Katto opened the most constraining buttons of her basque, removed her calico sunbonnet, and raised her voluminous skirt from her bare feet. With the return of comfort her loftiness dwindled.

"Read it once for me," she said. "Pete he say that Herman's going to see ocean."

"Yes, he's a bull-whacker and on his way to the Pacific. Think of it! I can't imagine shy little Herman in a job like that." Nell turned the page and read it again aloud: " 'I walk by the bulls and prod them with a stick. Me and many other boys with a long row of wagons. We will go till we get to the ocean . . .' "

"He gives no address," Nell said, disappointed. "I'd like to write or have Sheila write and tell him how Wild Goose has recovered. Perhaps he worries about it."

"Ach, he don't think on that no more. He wants for to be artist. Always, always, he want for to be artist.

Now he will go to ocean. Now he will be artist." Katto spoke with disdain for any contrary opinion.

"I'm afraid he's gone to the wrong ocean. He should have gone east. There's no one to teach him out there."

"Always teacher, teacher with you. He don't need teacher. If Herman got the drawings in his head they can get into his fingers without all time teacher, teach."

"Well, I hope so, Katto. Herman has talent," Nell concluded, as she folded the letter and returned it. "Schwartz will be glad to hear from him."

As Katto stuffed the letter into her bosom, she leaned back in her chair. "Yes, Schwartz. I will be glad, too, when Schwartz and my Nick comes back. By Gutt, Nell, it's hard work there with just the boys and me. We cut some slough grass last week for fire."

"I'm doing a little baking now, on cattle chips the children gathered. We get so tired of twisting hay. When Tim comes again, though, we must put up a little hay."

"Pete he says that Injun's around here yet. He needs another crack once before he'll go. I tell him so, too, if I was you. He don't come near my house." Katto was grabbing at the grasshoppers which alighted on her, and when she succeeded in catching one she pulled off its legs and head and cast it down. "That one won't live no more— But if you're afraid to tell that Injun I'll tell him once."

"No, no, Katto. Don't say anything. I've been handling him with gloves on. We're here alone with the children and we'll let well enough alone, in the name of God. He'll soon be clearing out."

They discussed relative merits of ducks and turkeys,

and the conversation shifted to bits of gossip. Nell evidently had not been hearing the news, and Katto grew voluble as she narrated.

"Jake Van den Hull's wife has gone back to Bella again. She should stay in Bella. She's one from high tone Dutch."

"And who's with the children?"

"His mother she come. And did you know then that there's trouble at Max's again? The hired man he quit and he wants that he and Lena shall go away. Max he say, 'Lou, if you quit me, you shall not have Lena.' Lou he say, 'I quit you and I shall have Lena.' So it goes. . . . His Katie tell my Pete."

Nell leaned forward. "Bully for Lou to have some gumption. Max's wife should see to it that they are married now, and then let them off."

"Oh, Max's wife she is for Lena, but you know, Mrs. Connor, that she can do nothing. Her man is so crazy with his meanness and that there sickness in his leg he says he will follow them if they go far as the Mississipp' and then he will throw her in. By Gutt, I guess if he had two good legs once no one could live near him."

"Max is not as bad as he appears. He just likes to bully people."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Connor, people that know him once in Dubuque they shake their heads over him. Did you know that Bill Breidbarth's wife got the consumting? They read it in the almanac; it say there just the same as she got it. They got no money for to send away for the cure, so I guess maybe she won't live much longer. I guess there'll be enough of Low Germans anyhow left

if she does die." Katto smiled wickedly, expecting a reprimand, and she got it.

"Shame on you, Katto, you with your good health. There's seven children there, and a drinking man."

"I aint so soft like as you are, Mrs. Connor, and I think it is best that way. Of course we got to have some foolish ones." She reached for the discarded bonnet.

"Don't go yet. What's your hurry? I just die for someone to talk to," Nell said.

"I must go. With those boys maybe I ain't got no house when I get home; and I heard some hens caxing in the trees as I come down. I must get their eggs before it is dark."

Nell stood up and the two women faced each other. "Well," Nell said, "things are pretty bad, Katto, but I suppose they could be worse."

Katto viciously decapitated an unfortunate hopper and dashed it on the ground. "By Gutt, we ain't dead with the hunger yet."

She perched her bonnet on her head, leaving the strings untied, and waddled off, having lost every trace of her attempted superciliousness. Once out on the prairie, her gait resumed what Tim called "a sling trot," and she disappeared near her own grove, there to take care of the place and the boys, to prepare meals from scanty rations, to do the chores, and to search out the hens that were "caxing" in the grove.

At the supper table, Nell told the children some of the news of the neighborhood and added: "We should thank God that He leaves us our health and our senses." As they recited the prayer after meals in chorus: "We give Thee thanks, O Almighty God, for these and all

Thy blessings . . ." Max's girl, Lena, stood in the doorway.

"Hide me! Hide me!" she begged, her breath short from her recent haste. A shaft of sunset light falling across her threw an attenuated silhouette into the room.

Nell looked in amazement at the girl. Never before had she seen such terror in one so young. Lena's thin face was ashen white, and her eyes dark as coals. . . . The face receded, and Nell was conscious only of black eyes, pleading, terror-stricken.

"He said he'd kill me and he *will!*"

This aroused Nell. The imminent danger became apparent as she saw Max's sulky speeding across the prairie. She recalled Katto's recent information.

"Go up in the loft—come on," she said, leading the way. "He can't climb."

"Mary is with him, and she'll climb. Don't put me in a trap."

Nell looked about the house. There was the oven, but the stove was warm. The trundle bed, sagging so that an occupant could not make a perceptible bulge, suggested itself as a hiding place. Nell doubled back the covers. "Here, come on, hop in here and I'll put the baby in with you."

Lena curled up her slim body and the bed sank. When Nell bent to remove the sleeping Alice, the child's helplessness reproached her. She couldn't take that innocent child and place her in danger. She must choose someone who had, at least, the use of his feet. "Kitty Ann, would you go to bed and play you're sick to help Lena?"

The child answered in tears: "No, I don't want to be sick. I'm well."

Bewildered, Nell looked about for a solution. Was there no one who could understand? Must she always be alone?

"Let me, Mom," volunteered Danny eagerly, "and if that old Max comes near me I'll pull the red whiskers off'n him. And if he tries to drag me out, I'll jump up and step on his sore leg."

Nell, convinced that she had a dependable ally, tucked Danny into the small bed. It was not until years afterward, however, that she could smile at that ludicrous picture: Danny a sick boy, with such roguery in his eyes that he must keep them closed; a face tanned and torn, eager for excitement; a body relaxed and comfortable after having done full justice to a supper of mush and milk.

The unusualness of this excitement caused the younger Connors to cry, adding more tumult; but Margaret and Kitty Ann smiled in anticipation of something—they knew not what.

"Clear out of the house, every one of you," Nell commanded.

Sheila hung back.

Nell recalled Sheila's previous lack of tact when questioned by the Indian on the prairie.

"Take them toward Schwartzes'," she said. "Run now, and if questioned remember not a word. Out with you. Robert Emmet, quit your pipering. Margaret, Sheila, take Ellen by the hand. If Max comes near you, remember, run—run and say boo to no one."

The sulky was close to the grove now. Nell at-

tempted no further advice to her accomplices, but made useless trips from table to stove, lifting dishes and pans and setting them down again.

She prayed: "Oh, Holy Ghost, enlighten me."

Max, a wild lion, growling oaths and threats, was there before her at the door. He was attempting to climb down. Nell hastened to aid Mary in the herculean task of sustaining him. Max shook Nell off, threw one leg over the back of the sulky, and sat hesitant, dreading to move the diseased member.

"What ails you, Max, coming out this way on your leg?" Nell asked.

His only answer was a grimace, the result of a spasm of pain.

"What's amiss?" Nell asked Mary casually.

"We will tell you once when we find Lena," Max answered uncivilly. To Mary: "Go once and find Lena. Go first to barn and granary."

Mary went toward the barn.

"Is Lena gone?" Nell asked as if surprised. "Well, well. Trouble never comes single. I've got a boy here that isn't himself, either. Wish Tim would be along."

Nell prattled unconvincingly. She felt a pity for Max. His big frame trembled with pain. His day was done. He who had ruled by brute force alone was now forced to surrender. He could threaten to shoot, but if he did he would be taken away to die in jail, and he knew it.

"I'll be going in to Danny," Nell explained, as she went into the house.

"It's Mary you'll have to contend with now," she whispered.

Lena heard in despair—Mary was her father's dependence. Mary not only feared her father but she was jealous and bitter toward Lena.

Danny assured her: "I'll fix Mary."

"Why Danny, what's happened to you?"

Danny evidently had climbed out of bed, procured the cornstarch which she had secreted for a chafing baby, and applied it liberally to his face.

As Mary entered the house Nell stroked the sick boy, thereby rearranging the extravagant make-up.

Mary's stocky figure climbed the ladder and descended. She was sullen.

"Come here, Mary. Don't let him see you." Nell indicated the pale Danny. "It might be catching. It's queer he's acting. Out of his head like."

Mary drew quite near. Danny looked up at her, then grabbed a corner of the quilt and began chewing it ravenously. "Gr-r-r, wang, wang wang," he uttered, looking furtively the while at Mary.

Mary drew back. "I guess he thinks he is a cat," she said, "eating meat. Out of his head."

"Do you think your mother would know of something to do?" Nell asked disconsolately. "Do you suppose he would spring out and hurt the other children?"

"He might," Mary answered, as she looked about the house perfunctorily, keeping one eye on the mad Danny.

"Stay awhile," Nell begged as Mary, through with her search, stood a moment in the doorway before returning to the sulky.

"No, I must go. I can't find Lena."

"Maybe she struck off toward Shelbourne."

"No, Annie say she come this way."

"Perhaps it was Sheila she saw."

"Maybe 'twas."

"If she comes, I'll tell her," Nell went on, but Mary, preoccupied, had left the house. She must tell her father that she had failed!

"Lena is not here," she said. "They got a sick one here, Danny. He won't live, I think. We go. Maybe it's catchin'."

"I get sheriff," Max answered.

They were gone. The broad, sagging sulky disappeared.

Danny was already afoot, but Lena remained curled up even after Nell had withdrawn the covers. After a talk with her, Nell went out and sat on the platform of the pump.

What could she do for Lena? The young couple in their perfidy of getting away had not thought of propriety. With fear and threats hanging over their heads, they had not been capable of estimating values. Lou seemed a decent sort of fellow, but a perfect stranger to everyone in the neighborhood. Yes, they must be married before they go away.

Father Luermann was in Casper Center. "This is Saturday," Nell reasoned. "He'll be there for Mass tomorrow." Yes, it was four weeks ago that Tim had taken in Mass there on his way home.

She'd go to Casper Center with Lena and get Lou, who was waiting there with a team. They could be married and start out. How could she go? Little Alice could not be left—she was feeling none the best as it was. She would take little Alice and Danny with her. Danny could drive the oxen. Was it safe to take Danny

off the place, with herself and Tim gone? And Wild Goose! Lord save us, why Wild Goose was still hanging about! She pondered on the fox—goose—oats problem. Katto? No. There must be no excitement in the neighborhood. She stood up. There was no other way. She would take Wild Goose with her.

The prairie was in its nightly hush when Buck and Spec were swung out on the trail. In the wagon, Nell, holding wee Alice, shared the seat with Wild Goose. Lena sat crouched in the back, her head bowed lest it appear above the wagon box. She held the unlighted lantern.

The consciousness of being pursued which obsessed the women was evidently unfelt by Wild Goose and the tortoise-paced oxen. The Indian boy sat listlessly. Nell urged and beseeched the oxen to hasten their gait, but they remained immune to the fever of flight.

They picked a circuitous trail to Casper Center to evade the agents of Max; it was unfamiliar and seemed interminable. If they could have hidden in the protecting cloak of darkness, they might have been more at ease; but it was light—the stars and moon, shining brightly, traveled with them into the town.

After what seemed like days, Wild Goose brought Buck and Spec to a halt before the livery barn. Lou was bunking there. He joined them, and they drove over to a small white house next door to the largest building in the town—the church. Nell alighted and knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" a voice called out, and Nell's heart beat gratefully. Father Leurmann was at home!

"It's me, Mrs. Tim Connor. I have a couple here

leaving the neighborhood. Marry them, Father, in the name of God."

Before the priest had opened the door, the young couple—Lou carrying Alice sleeping as soundly as if she were in her crib—joined Nell.

Nell whispered to Lou: "It's customary, you know, to give him a trifle. You have it. It's your duty. He gets hardly enough to keep body and soul together."

Lou nodded.

"I'll have to have another witness," the priest said, surveying the crowd.

"We have an Indian outside." Nell spoke up. Then, seeing the look of surprise on his face, she added: "Not a real Indian. He has some White in him—I'm thinking tonight a great deal."

She snatched the baby from the embarrassed groom. "It's my child, Father, the youngest of six besides an adopted one."

"God bless you," the priest commented. "You're a good woman."

Little time was spent in formal preparation—a license was not required in the county at this time.

Wild Goose, summoned, took his place as witness beside Nell Connor. His face was sphinx-like. Whether he grasped the significance of his rôle or not, no one knew.

Lena and Lou were married.

"I have no treat or banquet for you, but I'll give you my blessing," the priest concluded; and he made a generous sign of the Cross on the motley group.

At the livery barn, Nell saw Lena placed in a carriage and driven away. As the sound of the spirited hoofs

died in the distance, she was seized with a sense of desolation and physical weariness. The shanties of the town were black and forbidding. There was no sign of life. Wild Goose lighted the lantern and stood by the wagon. "If I only knew someone to whom I could go and get a cup of hot tea," she wished furtively. "I feel so—faint."

The boy answered nothing. Nell climbed into the wagon. They retraced their way, again taking the route south of the slough to avoid any encounters with the frenzied Max.

"I'm not so afraid of him, but he might put a bullet in one of us," Nell reasoned.

Enroute home she realized that she and poor helpless Alice were alone with an Indian. She thought of her first night on the prairie, how she had mistaken the goo-gooings of the prairie chickens for Indian signals. A wave of that terrible horror returned to her as she reviewed the night. She tried to reassure herself by recalling Ben's experiences: "I trust an Indian further than lots of white men." Tim's, too. Tim was not afraid of Indians. "Treat 'em decent and they'll let you alone." But Tim was always so trusting. He couldn't think evil of anyone.

She looked sideways at the boy. His face was thin; the scar on his head discernible. It was, no doubt, to be near this boy that his white grandmother had made a long journey back to the red people years ago. Perhaps she had passed near this very trail!

"Stars are not so bright. They're sort of hidden." She tried to break the tenseness of a night so soundless that even her thoughts seemed clattering things.

"Stars, no; but Wild Goose knows that stars will go farther away. Wild Goose knows there's heap fire."

Nell looked about her. The air was a little hazy. "There's always fire nowadays," she answered. "I can smell it nights when there is wind. Everyone is smudging the prairie to kill off the grasshoppers. I hope to the good Lord that they'll succeed in getting rid of 'em."

There was no answer; only a tense, palpitating silence.

Nell bowed her head lower over the sleeping Alice, and swayed with the motion of the wagon.

The oxen stopped with a jolt. Nell would have fallen forward had not Wild Goose held a restraining arm.

She rubbed her eyes. Dawn! Not dawn! "It's fire!"

Surrounded by clouds of smoke, Buck and Spec, off the trail and in grass to their bellies, bawled dismally.

"Maybe they'd go on the trail. Did you get lost? Lord save us! What'll we do?"

"Wild Goose leaves trail, goes to slough so Kind Woman and papoose will not burn."

So saying, he leaped over the wheel, quieted the oxen by turning them away from the oncoming smoke, and led them on toward the slough in a more diagonal course.

Nell pulled the shawl about Alice to protect her from the pungent smoke, and shut her eyes. "The children and Tim! May the Lord protect them, too!" When she heard the stamping of the oxen in the slough and the slashing of water on the wheels, she opened her eyes and looked into an ocean of fire.

It was a bad fire. The fierce, singing kind whose billows of blaze overlapped each other in their haste to destroy. As it drew nearer, its tune became the roar of mad animals frothing smoke and lapping, lapping red tongues. On it came! Jaws snapped and bit. At the edge of the slough the flames leaped higher and hurled sparks toward the wagon.

Something in Wild Goose found a challenge in the frenzy of the fire. He left his place of safety near the wagon, tore off his shirt, and bounded to the water's edge. Like a demon he lashed the fire, uttering wild, uncanny shrieks, running into its midst to be scorched and singed, and returning to plunge into the water.

It was wild, barbaric! His movements were in accord with the spirit of the fire.

Nell sat fascinated, tensely pressing her feet against the box of the wagon. "Wonder if he's lost his senses, or is it a custom of Indians to torture themselves like that!" The boy's lithe body bounded into the smoke—for an instant it would be lost—and soon again Nell could see the dark silhouette against the ruddy background.

The flames receded; the billows rushed on. In their wake they left smoke and darkened prairie.

Wild Goose returned to the wagon. Without a word he led the oxen from the slough and resumed his seat.

"Where's your shirt? Did you burn your shirt entirely?"

Wild Goose smiled as though in reminiscence.

"You're all blistered! Foolish boy, to burn yourself like that."

"Wild Goose can bear pain. Wild Goose will be a man."

To this Nell had no comment.

They drove on through a sea of charred prairie. Occasionally a smoking tuft of grass would shoot into blaze like a sky-rocket and as quickly die down again.

Nell was crying now. What if it had got the children! "Wild Goose, can't they hurry any faster? If we only had Jack and Jule! Do you think Danny could handle the firebreak? What if they did not waken in time!"

Dawn scattered a faint tinge of light. The oxen were spectral, moving, scarcely moving. Daylight grew bolder and flooded the black prairie.

Nell's eyes ached: her sight was not keen. Would the prairie ever cease to be black?

A pack of dogs rushed at the oxen. Schwartz's dogs! They were in the neighborhood of home.

"Look, Wild Goose, look! Isn't that a fresh firebreak? Is it?" She strained her eyes toward a band of lustrous black.

"Heap fire not jump fresh firebreak," the Indian boy answered in his solemn way.

Thank God! The children were safe.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE house was spectral, quiet. Nell placed Alice in the cradle. Robert Emmet and Ellen were in their trundle-bed. Thank God, Danny had had sense enough to sleep downstairs. There he was in the big bed, with Kitty Ann by his side. Margaret and Sheila were breathing deeply in the other room. They were all there, safe and sound, and Lena was married and gone. Their many escapes proved the goodness and mercy of God. Nell moved the sprawling Kitty Ann over and lay down beside her.

Later in the morning Danny sat up in bed, his hair and eyebrows black with soot.

Nell was on her feet in an instant. "Lord save us, Danny, were you in the fire?"

"Oh, Mom, there was a terrible fire. We were all in bed and Max's wife came over and said that Max got so mad when they couldn't find Lena last night that he smashed the lantern on the cart wheel and lit the prairie. Mary told her mother about me. She thought I was sick, so she came over. And Katto was out plowing our firebreak. She had Pete with her. Our break was all overgrown with grass—and Mom, she was mad at Pop. She said he should have stayed back East with the Yankees and never brought you here or nothing. She said he was no good except for making jokes and singing, and that didn't get money."

One by one the other children awoke and sat up in bed to listen to the night's excitement.

" 'N Max's wife said Pop was as kind as a woman and that she would like a man like that. Katto said that one who goes tramping and lets his family burn because they got no good firebreak—"

"Danny! Danny! Now don't be repeating such. . . . You're safe and you have a good father."

"And, oh Mom, the fire leaped over in places and we tramped it out and Katto kept plowing all the time.

"God bless Katto." Nell repeated, tightening her belts about her, preparing for another day and what it would bring forth. "Van den Hull's wife left here because there was nothing going on! . . ."

"And Max's wife is coming here tonight," Danny continued, "so don't be afraid when she comes. She asked about Lena, and I told her, Mom, because I knew she was on our side."

"You did right. And did you sleep through it all?" Nell asked Sheila, who with Margaret was perched on the foot of the big bed.

"I never heard a thing."

"Nor you, Margaret?"

"I heard noises, but I knew Danny was awoke."

Nell said nothing more, and was soon out in the kitchen rattling stove lids. Barley coffee and fried mush were very acceptable to a weary and hungry body.

"I saw big prairie fire, too," Robert Emmet began. "Bigger than your head, too, and I plowed firebreak, too."

"When, Emmet, when?" the others chorused, smiling in anticipation.

"Oh, one time I did."

Nell had decided to be more civil to poor Wild Goose after his gallantry on her secret trip, but for days the boy avoided the house. After recalling his barbaric dance on the edge of the slough, he was ashamed and disgusted with himself. He was not White, but Indian, he thought ruefully. It was with something like relief that one day he saw his small pony, Scar Neck, being led by another Indian on horseback, on the horizon. It was, he knew, a summons back to his father.

That evening, leaving his companion and the horses out in the shadows, he joined the Connors before their door. He told them about his father's lands and his home. "Better than the house of white men. I will go to my father, but I will come back," he said significantly. "There is one who will be glad to see Wild Goose come back."

Nell, content in knowing that he was going, was not greatly concerned with his return.

"Which way will you go? Won't you get lost?" the younger children asked.

"Wild Goose will cross Big Muddy at Floyd's Bluff."

"What's Floyd's Bluff?"

"There is where Indian is buried on a living horse. Wild Goose will pass Center Lake. There in the water an Indian girl sings. Wild Goose will listen."

"Why is she there?"

"Big Chief want the girl to be his squaw. She loved young brave. She threw herself into this lake and there she sings. Some day when Wild Goose leads his squaw to his father's house, he will pass Center Lake and he will say: 'My squaw loves Wild Goose.' "

"What does she sing? What does she sing?"

"She sings: 'Do not take a squaw who does not want to be your squaw.' It is a sad song."

"How does she live in the water?"

"Shucks!" Danny said, jumping up—angered, no doubt, that he, too, was feeling the spell of the musical-voiced narrator.

"Let him alone, Danny, Danny," Nell said softly. "Let him go in peace now."

Not a farewell was spoken. Before the circle of listeners were fully aware of it their guest had risen, taken a step or two backwards, and was swallowed in the night. The sound of horses' hoofs died away in the distance.

"I declare I'm glad he's gone off with himself. He actually gave me the shivers with his solemn stories," Nell said, relieved.

"He's a good Indian. Never scalped us or nothin'," Kitty Ann added.

Emmet said sadly: "Will he come back again tomorrow?"

"Huh, by tomorrow he won't even be to his home," Danny answered curtly.

Later on that night, as Nell tucked in Kitty Ann, the child remarked thoughtfully: "Wild Goose liked Sheila, didn't he, Mom?"

"I guess so."

"She won't marry him, will she?"

"Lord save us, no, child. What put such a notion into your head?"

"Well, it sounded like he wants to marry her and take

her past that lake where the Indian girl sings. He did like Sheila, Mom."

"Anyone can't help but like her. The teachers like her. Didn't Ben like her? Herman? And even old Max told his girls that they were a pack of crows compared to Connors' Sheila."

"Mom, do you like Sheila better than Danny and me and Emmet and Ellen and Margaret and the baby?"

"No, Kitty dear, I love you all the same. Every one of you. Every bit the same."

"Does Pop, too?"

"Pop does, too."

Wild Goose was forgotten next morning, for Tim was home. And there was so much to tell him. The fire impressed him; his lips twitched and his eyes grew glassy.

"Old Nero," was his only comment on Max's revenge.

Tim, as usual, had some groceries. "I have a bag of flour and a bit of tea here," he said.

Nell eagerly reached for the tea.

"It's only a few drawings I begged off of old Goebel in Walton. He set the finest cup of tea before me that mortal could wish. So overcome was I with the aroma of it, I couldn't taste it. I felt guilty, having it there by myself."

" 'Not like your tea, Tim?' Goebel asked me."

"I told him that I wished I could take it home so me wife could have some. 'She hasn't had anything,' I said, 'but the smell of the canister for months.' "

" 'Drink it down, Tim,' he said, 'and I'll send your

wife a few drawings.' And there it is. Keep it now for yourself. I'll be getting some again."

But Nell made two cups of tea, and Tim didn't refuse when one was placed before him. The pot was rinsed and drained for a second serving. Tim had brought crackers, too, and as Nell ate she felt well provided for, indeed.

CHAPTER XXVII

TIM was to stay at home now until after election. As usual he was to serve as a judge and carry the results to the county seat.

As election time approached and harvest in fortunate localities was over, men of the neighborhood returned with money in their pockets. Schwartz came back. Son Nick stayed on to pick corn, but Schwartz was also one of the judges of election.

Election day dawned clear and bright. As Tim and Schwartz walked to Center School, five miles away, the grass was spongy underfoot. The sods of recently ploughed land were whitish-gray rectangles of frost. Weeds and brush towered stick-like above the wilted grasses.

They discussed the summer. Schwartz had received eighteen dollars per month as a harvest hand five counties to the east. Tim had traveled to nearly all the surrounding towns in his search for buyers of ware.

Non-infested areas of Iowa were living a normal life, they agreed. Prices were good and hopes were high. People could hardly believe that such want was at their doors.

Schwartz swiped his nose with a forefinger. "When I tell 'em how bad we got it, Tim, they think I lie."

"I know, I know. I got so I didn't tell our circumstances. They were less suspicious of me. There's talk of relief from the State," Tim went on. "Both candidates

promise it. If we get the hay-twister in, he'll speak up for us."

"You mean Jim? Yes. I am for Jim. He is a good one, I think."

"A voter beat us," Tim remarked as they neared Center School. A carriage was before the door.

"Not one from this township," Schwartz said, drolly.

"Perhaps someone with instructions. We'll see."

"Voting here?" the stranger called from the carriage, and, as the men nodded, he jumped spryly down, unearthed a keg from under the lap robe and rolled it out on the ground.

"And cigars, too," he added, presenting them with a box. "Compliments of our next representative, Nate Young."

Brisk and agile, he was back in the buggy again. "Now, gentlemen, we expect you to do your best for Nate. Pass it around a-plenty. Get 'em all tight if need be."

"We don't want that stuff here," Tim remarked, as Schwartz glowered at him and tried to halt his speech.

"That's for you and Nate to settle," the man called back as he disappeared, no doubt to visit the next place of voting.

"Tim," Schwartz spoke up, "for a smart man, you are the biggest damn fool I ever see. Won't take—huh—what people want to give for nothing. You do the figuring here today and I'll tap the keg and see that before a man gets a drink of beer he votes first for Jim Long. Now go on, do the business."

Boyd, another judge of election, appeared soon. He was no lover of beer, but the cigars were very acceptable.

At midnight, when Tim and Boyd had finished counting ballots, Schwartz was sleeping soundly on the recitation bench. They roused him and he struck off with Tim in a cold, drizzling rain. Jim Long had carried the township by a large majority. In voting for Jim, many had to scratch their ballots and as a consequence had lost their votes. Going through the pelting rain, protecting his books under his coat, Tim smiled as he recalled scenes and arguments of the day.

Nell was sitting up, waiting. She had a fire and something to eat. As Tim did justice to his late supper he told what they had found in the count. "One man wrote: 'I want for Haytwister.' Poor devils! Some had just lately learned to write their names, so they added them to the ballots for good measure. I'd like to know who was the fairy-of-a-man that brought us the day's treats."

When Tim, driving Buck and Spec, struck off to the county seat with the election returns, it was still misty and there was a raw wind.

When he arrived in the morning's light, acquaintances called: "Here comes Connor, bearing the German township favorites."

Tim was in his element. There were jokes and story telling, and treats of cigars and hot toddies from friends of successful candidates. The hay-twister's election was unquestioned.

Tim returned home, assured that there would be some provision made for the winter. With Jim's election,

relief was in sight. He knew the people must get help from somewhere.

The defeated Nate Young, who had counted on a ballot for every drink and every cigar given out, was incensed. Immediately he began to use his influence against relief measures. "Sufferers are exaggerating. Times are not hard, but people want things handed to them."

When Jim Long presented his bill in the House asking for help, before action was taken a non-interested committee was sent to investigate conditions. The report disclosed pitiful circumstances of famine, and want unheard of. They had seen men with heads and feet wrapped in gunnysacks, and in clothing made of quilts, stacking hay to twist for a winter's fuel.

The House voted an appropriation of $50,000 for use in devastated areas. The cry for help was answered throughout the state. Carloads of clothing, flour, leather for tapping boots, and other necessities were sent. Grasshopper bees became a fad. But in the distribution of the charities some few received more than their just dues; others received nothing at all. The Connors were among the latter.

The cars were practically empty when Tim arrived. Still he stood there, fingering the coupon presented him: "————, Iowa. ————18—. I. ————, do solemnly swear, so help me God, that I have not flour or other provisions sufficient to last my family *one week*, and that I have no means on hand or at my command to procure subsistence for my family."

Tim hesitated.

"I have a few provisions on hand—enough for a week," he said finally. "I can't take that oath."

"Make way then," he was told, "for others who have more belly than conscience."

Tim perforce moved aside, and returned home with an empty wagon.

Later, a carload of flour was received. It was stored in a schoolhouse to be kept in reserve until cold weather, when it was to be rationed out. Practically all of the flour disappeared the first night.

Pete Weiss, whom Tim had accompanied to the county seat on several occasions, came to Tim again, in tears—he was among those accused of theft of flour. "You come with me. I pay you; I pay—"

Tim was incensed at the charge. "Indeed 'n' I'll defend you, pay or no pay. The ones accusing him are perhaps guilty themselves," he told Nell, "imposing on a poor devil like Pete because he can't speak for himself."

Accordingly Tim accompanied Pete, and the court freed him of the charge.

On their return, Pete said: "I pay you . . . I got not much money but I got some of that flour. I give you flour, heh?"

Tim was dumbfounded. "No, I'll take money. Five dollars. *Five*, do you hear? Don't you come to Tim Connor again. Now clear out."

Although Tim was crestfallen at Pete's duplicity, he said that it was worth his humiliation to hear Nell laugh at him. It was one of her best taunts during the winter. "A fine reputation you'll have, defending criminals," she said. "Better defend that old man that was here yesterday trying to sell children's clothes he had taken from the car. I asked him if he didn't have children that they

fit. He said that he had no children at all. Places like that is where much of the clothing went."

"Well, some childer got what they needed. I hope," Tim said disconsolately, "and I guess I'll take to the road again. Me feet are on the ground." So he got another shipment of cutlery—on time—and hoped to trade it for merchandise at the stores.

During his absence Nell and Katto visited Johann's deserted shanty with the purpose of disposing of his belongings. The youngest Connors, eager for any new diversion, followed but stayed outside the door. Danny had said that the shanty was haunted and they had believed. The November sunshine was inviting this morning, so they gathered rose haws and opened milkweed "pods."

Johann's shanty was in much the same condition as he had left it: it bore no evidence of Wild Goose's tenancy. Dead grasshoppers crunched under foot.

"By Gutt, love letters!" Katto ejaculated, as foraging in a valise, a shower of envelopes littered the floor. "My Pete and my Ditz will make fun over those. I take them home."

"We'll burn the letters, Katto."

"Are you afraid once of the dead ones?" Katto asked, looking sharply at Nell Connor's face.

"The dead won't hurt you. Here, see here, these things." Nell had a box on her lap. She unearthed pictures. Johann in curls in the various stages of childhood, a man in military costume. . . . "I bet this is his father. He looks like a Sittin' Bull. See. . . ." There were a lady's handkerchief, a card of pink celluloid rosettes, a blue ribbon. . . .

Katto misinterpreted the look on Nell's face. "Dead ones—they can be mean once, too. I call him greenhorn when he was living. He may greenhorn me once, too. . . . I better not talk on him."

"Nonsense, Katto." Nell looked at her companion, so fearless of the living but in awe of the dead. "There are lots of clothes here. We'll divide 'em. There are uniforms, even. All our boys can be German soldiers."

"I don't think I take any. My boys can go in their skin first. I know a man one time he wore clothes of a dead man, and one time when there was a storm he went to the door and, by Gutt, he got the thunder right in the face. That dead man he don't want him to have those clothes."

"Nonsense, nonsense, woman dear. Gather up some of these clothes and be glad you have them. The guns we'll put in one of the boxes in our granary. Some time they can be used if necessary . . . your boys might blow each other's heads off with them, now. Danny, bring the wagon over and we'll move this stuff into the granary."

"And the ghost can have the shanty?" Katto asked roguishly.

"And the ghost can have the shanty."

The day of the first snowfall, Tim came into the yard riding a horse and leading a second. He had Jack and Jule! The liveryman, not very hopeful of his business, had asked Tim to keep the team during the winter for their food. Tim had readily consented.

The return of Jack and Jule was a good omen. Their presence restored hopes and spirits.

"Can we sell them again?" the children asked.

"No, we can't sell them. They are not ours."

When winter prevented Tim from continuing his peddling, he aided Nell in preparing Sheila for the teacher's examination which was at hand. How fortunate they were to have Jack and Jule to make that long, cold trip to the county seat!

CHAPTER XXVIII

"SHEILA, Sheila."

The glare from the lamp in Nell Connor's hand fell across the girl's face.

"Sheila, Sheila."

Sheila tried to open her eyes but succeeded only in closing them tighter, her face taking on a grimace. In the interval between sleeping and waking, she reasoned vaguely that she was not sick, nor could she recall a bad dream in which she might have called for help—why was Mom over her, with that light?

Nell's hand was on her shoulder. "Get up, Sheila. Get up to go and take the examination." Holding the lamp so that its direct glare would be obstructed by her body, Nell deftly rolled back the warm quilts. "Hop out now," coaxingly, as a wave of frigid air swept over Sheila. "It's turned colder and snowed more during the night. You'll have to bundle up well. Leave on your old petticoat inside the good one." Nell and the light moved away.

Sheila jumped out of bed, and with bare feet scarcely touching the cold floor she followed the light into the warm kitchen. Her clothes were there: dress hanging limply on a chair near the oven door, new stays rolled and in their box, shoes, "strong shoes," toeing in on the zinc mat.

Nell was padding about in a pair of Norway socks which Tim had brought her. They were soft and sooth-

ing to her varicose veins. She moved with a subdued force which stimulated those about her to action.

Sheila, hunched up on a chair, her knees drawn up under her chin, reflexively reached for a black wool stocking.

Nell put a generous lump of butter into the spider of warmed-over potatoes. As she chopped them, the shawl on her shoulders flapped and her coil of hair wound without a pin on the top of her head swayed like an unsteady chimney.

"If the roads aren't drifted too much you'll get there in plenty time. Don't be afraid, now, to put down what you think. You're as well qualified as any of 'em." she encouraged, and added as an afterthought: "If any advanced pupils come this winter—which I doubt, for where would they come from?—Tim and myself can keep you ahead of 'em nights."

Sheila, her loosened hair hanging over her face and shoulders, was absorbed in the unaccustomed task of adjusting stays. She tugged at the laces with no result and answered nothing

"Here, turn around. Let me give you a hand with that." Nell left off setting the table and assisted the girl. "You'll get some shape with this." she said, pulling the laces tightly as Sheila's pliant body took on hips and bosom. "Now tell me when it's too tight." At a protest from Sheila—"Must be tight, you know."

Nell stood off a bit. "My old basque fits you tip-top now. That head of yours!" With the lamplight upon it, and disheveled, it shone like ripe grass. "We'll braid it up tight first of all." she suggested, "and then pin it up on your head. I'll go and get my few pins."

When Nell carried away the lamp, Sheila was in darkness. She watched the rectangles of red from the draft of the stove shiver on the floor.

As Nell arranged the girl's hair she warned her: "Feel of your stack during the day and keep it pinned. Don't have it streaming down your neck like old Mrs. Probst, who has only nails to fasten hers." She ran the comb through Sheila's bangs, which she had cut recently. "I declare, I like the bangs on you." So engrossed was she in the job of making a lovely, grown-up lady out of Sheila that thoughts of the momentous affair of the day were tentatively put aside.

"Sheila, your hair is like braided straw. I never plaited my hair. I wore it in row upon row of curls until I was married. Your hair is much longer and heavier than mine ever was. Back East now I could keep yours lovely." (Nell's graying hair still curled kindly about her face and neck.)

The kitchen door suddenly creaked open and Tim, his face red and eyes watery, emerged from a puff of frosty air. "Ha-hah," he greeted Sheila. "The frost this morning will take the cockalene out of your eye." Finding the girl unresponsive, he continued with a wink: "Quite a pedagogue. Say, Sheila, could you be after telling a fellow how many '*a*'s' there are in *separate* this mornin'? To my recollection there was only one in it last night."

Sheila bit her lower lip and industriously set the table. The knives and forks had once been silver plated; the dishes were unmatched, a transparent saucer holding a thick, cracked cup.

The girl felt sick and afraid. She resented Tim's fes-

tive manner. He was, moreover, dressed up. A pair of Johann's trousers was pulled on over his old jeans; his beard was trimmed; and a boiled shirt almost completely hid the hickory one beneath.

Tim was quiet at breakfast, while Nell urged Sheila to eat her serving of egg and potatoes. When more than a share of cream was poured into the girl's coffee, a lump rose in her throat; she couldn't swallow.

"Head ache or anything?" Nell asked solicitously.

Tim, chewing audibly, supplemented: "Eat up, now. It's a long day we have before us." Less seriously: "It's too dainty the lady is to eat. Good thing the county superintendent isn't a man, I'm a-thinkin', or I'd be coming back without me girl."

Sheila, seventeen, very much a child and somewhat a woman, felt a tenderness heretofore unexperienced toward these two—Mom and Pop. She realized that they in their goodness of heart were doing the very best they could for her in their present circumstances. They had prepared her, encouraged her, to teach school. Neighbor girls were bound out as hired help. Never need she work hard while there were Mom and Pop. With this appreciation a sadness came over her. No, all of Mom's dreams for her would not be realized. For the present she would dismiss this premonition and try to pass; oh, she would try so hard to pass! She would be painstaking in her writing and not forget and make a capital *I* like a capital *J* . . . why were they so much alike!

Tim had risen and had kicked in his chair. He put on his coat, cap and scarf and carried the warm brick from the oven to the sled. Nell bundled up Sheila, putting her own black fascinator over the girl's hood, crossing

it under her chin and tying it in the back. Her shawl also was placed over Sheila's and fastened securely with a safety pin. She pressed something cold into Sheila's hand—two nickels and a dime—with the direction: "You can go out at noon with the others and get yourself a hot bite to eat. Tim, I suppose, will be about town. Tie this in your handkerchief and put it in the pocket of your petticoat. Stop at Boyd's coming back, too, if you're cold."

Sheila stood on the threshold. Nell held the lamp high. The air was sharp, cutting as knives. The lamp made a yellow fan on the black outside and disclosed Jack and Jule and the bobsled with the top box. The seat was in the bottom, resting in hay. Tim stood in the sled, holding the reins in one hand and a corner of a quilt which was to be used as a robe in the other. The horses' breath sent white, ghostly spirals into the night. Tim, the horses with their glossy eyes, all things were conspirators. The frozen mud on the wagon, the red runners on the sled, the money in her handkerchief, the new clothing . . . *everything* was plotting with her seventeen years to compel her to leave Nell's wing and to face the outside.

"Oh, it's black and cold," she said, drawing closer to Nell. The horses, stamping, were impatient to be off.

"Hurry on, Sheila." Tim coaxed. "Don't you know the blackest hour is just before the dawn?"

Somehow her feet carried her body to the sled and found the brick placed for them. The red fan of light disappeared from the door. The horses lunged into the unknown.

The dignity and novelty of ladyhood which she had

experienced yesterday were gone. Then she had tilted the mirror in their dresser, better to view the long skirt and the curves of her body in a corset. Now she struck at the hard, uncomfortable stays with her mittened fist. She felt wretched and shackled.

Tim was silent, standing with feet wide apart, tugging at the reins as the horses floundered in deep drifts.

It was a strange, cold world in which Sheila traveled. There was no sky, no prairie. A ghost-like moon appeared and sailed along in the darkness. A wind moaned feebly and whipped light, powdery snow about, raising it from its snug drifts of night. A coyote's cry resounded, then another: these died away in the emptiness of the world. They were speeding through Sheila's herding grounds, but she saw no landmarks, only a stretch of homelessness and night.

"Cold?" Tim shouted, bending toward her.

Chills coursed up her back. "Yes, a little," she answered.

"Soon be at the half-way house."

Sheila had been anticipating this stop at Boyd's, the half-way house, for many weeks. The house, a log cabin, was a novelty in this region. Boyd had not adopted the temporary sod shelter or the pine shanty of the prairie settler, but instead had hauled logs from the Sioux River to erect this home. It was built in a thicket of willows on Mill Creek, and had a snugness which the prairie homes lacked. His family was hospitable, his location midway between two towns, so he was the host on many occasions.

Tim drew up the team a few feet from the window and uttered a long drawn-out "Whoa-o!" A head im-

mediately appeared in the doorway. In an instant, Boyd greeted them and led Sheila into the house. "Be with you in a minute," he called back to Tim.

Sheila walked with difficulty. Her feet had lost all sense of feeling. Mechanically she moved them and found herself in a large kitchen where a lamp hung from the ceiling. A small woman unfastened some of her wraps and placed her in a chair.

"Better not go to the stove for a while," she cautioned.

When the men opened the door, the hanging lamp swayed gently and the green cottonwood shoots which had sprouted down from the logs stirred. A canary in a white cage chirped sleepily and began hopping about from swing to perch.

"Take off the rest of your wraps now and walk about," the little, dark-eyed woman directed, hardly looking at Sheila, so intent was she on getting something to eat on the table.

Tim declined eating. "We just want to warm up a bit," he explained. "No one has food to give away."

Boyd insisted, and the travelers were refreshed with warm coffee and corn cakes.

Boyd, a hearty man with a political turn of mind, liked company. Tim, also, enjoyed talking and was loath to leave, but he said that they must hurry away so that Sheila would not start her examination with the handicap of being late. Mrs. Boyd, though less effusive, was kind and dutiful. She bundled Sheila into her shawls, wrapped the reheated brick, and invited them to stop on their way back.

At the door Sheila cast a last, lingering look around

the comfortable room whose ceiling was a summer canopy of green twigs. The lively little bird, caged but happy, was hopping about from perch to swing, from swing to perch, singing of a future day of freedom.

As they continued their way, daylight unrolled a white, pellucid landscape before them. The light revealed more strikingly the emptiness of the white earth. Uniform brown groves, clogged with snow, made a feeble attempt at sheltering clusters of buildings. That was all there was against the horizon—these rectangles of man-made groves.

A bar of yellow rimmed the east.

"Sun's coming," Tim shouted, pointing.

Sheila nodded.

"Soon be there now."

Sheila felt sick. She imagined she had forgotten everything she had ever learned. *What if she had!* She began: "To him who in the love of Nature . . ." She knew *that*. "We, the people of the United States . . ." She had not forgotten everything. "Two pints make one quart, eight quarts make one peck. . . ."

The sun had assumed its shape as a yellow disk and was gliding high into the heavens before they drove into the county seat. The windows of the square white courthouse were ablaze with sunlight, but on the streets nothing was astir.

The county superintendent was a tall, thin woman no longer young, but to quote Tim, "She hadn't altogether given up hopes."

Tim presented the applicant and left. Sheila was assigned a seat and given pen, ink, paper, and a list of questions.

HISTORY

1. *What do we owe Robert Fulton?*

Sheila thought: Do we *owe* Robert Fulton? Who is Robert Fulton? She had never heard of him. She was seized with panic. Her heart sank. She would not pass!

Sheila had never written an examination in her life, and most of her information had been obtained informally in the Connor home. The word *owe* was familiar enough. What do we owe on the wagon? What do we owe on the place? But what do we owe Robert Fulton? *Robert Fulton?* Now Robert Emmet . . . "When my country takes her place. . . ."

The man beside Sheila was writing in an easy, flowing style like the top line in a copybook. Dip, dip went his pen into the ink bottle at frequent intervals. How queer he looked! His skin was so white and his hair and moustache so black. He looked delicate. And his boots were as shiny as Max's new stove.

A girl behind her was writing, also scraping her pen and dipping it. They all knew what we owed Robert Fulton! Why had Mom and Pop not told her? Why hadn't Miss Inman told her? A wave of resentment surged through her. *They knew and they had not told her.*

The county superintendent opened the draft on the stove. Oh, why must the room be so warm? Sheila's toes smarted and the soles of her feet pricked in the intense heat. If only she could remove her shoes and scrape the soles of her feet on the floor! Oh, those stays! Why had she found that big nest of eggs last summer? *That* had begun the saving for the stays. Why had she gone out sweeping the weeds for eggs?

With her physical discomforts came the thought: The necessity of passing this examination. It seemed as though all her life Mom had been saying: "If Sheila passes." Well, Sheila would not pass, because they had not told her. Pop must take her home. How could she get out? She looked about. . . . All were intent upon their work. The county superintendent was out in the hall. Sheila made an effort to rise but instead put her head down on her arms and burst into tears.

Something pressed her foot. She moved her foot, but in an instant it was pressed again. She risked one eye on the floor and saw the shiny black boot, which had not been entirely withdrawn.

"Say," the delicate-looking man whispered, "what's the matter? Can't you answer any? Try 'em, they're easy. Put down something. Answer the ones you know."

Mom had said that, too—"Answer the ones you know."

Still, Sheila could not raise her head.

"Better hurry up now and quit that crying. The old lady'll be in and think you're a baby."

Sheila drew out the handkerchief from the pocket of her petticoat and dried her face. As she opened her eyes her glance fell on the list again.

"Barbara Frietchie. . . ."

Danny's oratorical voice: "Shoot if you must this old gray head. . . ." Yes. Barbara Frietchie was familiar. She was an old friend. She could answer that one.

Sheila dipped her pen and began her History. Arithmetic, Orthography, and Physiology followed. The aspirants did not leave *en masse* for refreshment at noon.

so Sheila wrote continuously. She filled out an application blank and completed the remaining subjects: Grammar, Geography, Reading, and Didactics. The county superintendent "corrected" the papers as they were handed in. Sheila, when finished, untied the coins from her handkerchief and waited for Pop.

Pop would show her the place where she could get something to eat. What if Pop didn't come! What if Pop had gone home! Would she stay here all night?

There was no answer. The big, moon-faced clock on the wall ticked ominously. There was the closing of doors. Inrushing puffs of cold air. The winter afternoon was slipping into night.

Oh, there was Pop! How welcome that tall, erect figure in the doorway! Childlike, Sheila left her seat and rushed toward him. Tim jerked off his cap and removed his clumsy mittens. As usual there was a smile on his lips and a drop of moisture on the tip of his aquiline nose.

The county superintendent approached him with a paper in her hand. "Your ward, or daughter, or whatever she is, is not yet eighteen years old. I cannot issue her a certificate," she announced officially.

"Since when," Tim spoke up hotly, "is it a test of years and not of learning?"

"Since October it is both, Mr. Connor. I'm sorry."

"Sheila may be more than seventeen. We have no record of her birth. She came to us a good-sized girl. We gave her a birthday, Christmas day. She may be past eighteen for all I know." Tim was thoughtful for a while, then continued: "If I say she's eighteen, does it not exonerate you? We'd like the girl to teach pretty bad this winter. She's got a school and everything. I *know*

she's eighteen. Now that's settled," he said pleasantly.

Miss Butterfield folded her arms in disdain. "No," she said, "I must uphold the honor of my office. I would never stoop to anything so base as that. This county has suffered enough from dishonesty already."

"It was not me intention at all to incriminate you or anyone else, but one thing you can do without loss to your honor or the county's—you can issue her a permit. A permit, as I understand, does not conform to the restrictions of a certificate. It can be issued at the judgment of the county superintendent."

Miss Butterfield, having triumphed once, drew herself up anew and said with an air of finality: "No. I have made it a practice during my years in office to issue no permits. They are issued too freely in adjoining counties."

A twinkle flashed in Tim Connor's eye. People who had seen this amused look in court were always a bit fearful of it afterwards. He fingered the beak of his cap and wiped at the drop of moisture on his nose. He spoke thoughtfully. "Perhaps it was in Woodbury, then, that Jerome Loutch received the permit on which he taught in our district a while back. Your first term, I believe. Loutch was a good six footer, but I knew he was not qualified for teaching; so when he came for his money order—I happen to be secretary of the school board—I questioned him as to what grade certificate he held, and asked to see it. He confessed that he had none at all, so I told him to secure one as quickly as possible—"

"This, I'm sure, does not concern me at all, Mr. Connor," Miss Butterfield interrupted. "I have others waiting."

"Hold on, now, hold on. This does concern you. Perhaps more than you're aware. In a week Loutch comes to me with a permit signed by the county superintendent, which was yourself, and says he to me honest enough: 'I'm not smart enough to teach. Your Danny knows more than I do, but the county superintendent gave me this. I electioneered for her.' "

"I don't know the man."

"Don't know Loutch? I don't see how anyone can hold a county office without knowing Jerome Loutch and the old man." Tim smiled again. "I happen to have the permit he taught on in me book, waiting for him to come back for his last month's wages: but, poor devil, he never came. Guess he thought he'd donate that much to the county. No doubt he knew that he was getting out on the skin of his teeth."

Color surged over Miss Butterfield's face; it flooded her forehead and ears. Without a word she turned to her desk, signed a permit, and handed it to Tim Connor.

Tim unfolded the document and read it carefully. "This will suffice," he said, "until she is a bit older. Come on, Sheila, we have a long road ahead of us."

Quite happy to be in the sled again and bound for home, Sheila forgot her hunger. The evening was very cold. The sun was dogged, lodged, it seemed, in its southwestern position a little above the horizon. It gradually disappeared in a yellow blur, and a cold wind again took possession of the earth. Jack and Jule, eager to reach home, needed no urging.

Sheila's memory of the day was a nightmare . . . a confusion of people and verbs and battles and tight clothing. There was a canary caged, too, which must be

freed sometime. It sang and hopped about, but it must be freed! It sang its song as she wrote the answers to her questions. The bars of that cage against which it beat its wings were stiff stays and sharp hairpins. She'd like to go some day and sneak in there and let that bird escape to build its nest in that clump of willows nearby.

Mrs. Boyd would miss the bird, though. . . . Mom and the children would be eating supper at home now. . . . Mom, yes . . . she would want to know the questions they had asked.

Suddenly Sheila forced the fascinator from her mouth and pounded on Tim's knee with a mittened fist.

Tim lowered his head.

"Say," she said, "do we owe Robert Fulton? It was the first question: 'What do we owe Robert Fulton?' "

"What?" Tim shouted, lowering his head the more. "What's that you say? 'What do we owe Robert Fulton?' "

Sheila nodded. "What do we?" she asked.

A roar of laughter was his only response. It echoed and re-echoed over the silent waste of snow.

Sheila wondered if he had been drinking too much during the day.

He turned to the bewildered girl. "It's a long story," he said. "I'll tell you when we get home. Won't Mom crow, though? And Boyd—that will be a good one to tell Boyd, but we won't stop tonight." Chuckling, Tim stood erect, braced his feet, and swerved his team from an unbroken drift.

Sheila huddled herself lower into the quilts. The sled runners were cutting sharply through the snow. The twilight hung like a sheer curtain through which hun-

dreds of stars multiplied and danced as she watched them. Her body ached. Her clothes were binding her without mercy. The coins in her mitten were cold. She closed her eyes—her lashes were frosty. The bobsled and team were moving through space now. She allowed her body to move with the sled. By keeping herself suspended thus between sky and prairie she would soon reach home, where there would be warmth and food and a welcome.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE repetition of the questions, and in particular *the debt owed Robert Fulton*, did not amuse Nell as it had Tim. "A question like that is no question at all," she argued. Sheila had passed! That was an absorbing piece of news. Sheila had passed. Sheila would be a teacher now.

With Sheila established in a school three miles from home, Nell's next chief concern was for her children's schooling. As she silently made innumerable trips from stove to table, to bedroom, she pondered on existing circumstances. . . . If they did secure a teacher and did open the corner school, how could her children attend? They had no warm clothing. Shoes. They had no shoes. One night as she lay sleepless, the cool air blowing across her open eyes, the deep breathing of her family isolating them from her world, she conceived a plan. Tim could teach, and instead of holding school in the building they could have it in their house. Fuel would be saved, and her children would not be perished in the cold.

She elbowed Tim but could not waken him. He, perhaps, would not consent, as the time of presenting it was not opportune. She pulled the covers about her and tried to sleep. Reaching out, she felt of Alice—one plump leg had evaded all security and was exposed. Nell took the child from its cradle and held it to her bosom. The little, cold leg pressed close to her warm

body. Nell prayed now. She could always pray fervently when she had a child at her heart.

Next day Tim agreed to her plan. "I can try it at any rate." He went to see the director, and on to the county seat. He procured a certificate without much ceremony. The patrons were satisfied: in fact, pleased. There would be no strife among the clans now; and if children who perforce must race about in moccasins of carpet or wool ventured out into the snow, Nell would prevent them. Yes, they were quite happy to place their troublesome broods in the Connors' keeping. Tim would earn his money.

Tim, with a second-class certificate, demanded five dollars a month more than Sheila, who received twenty-five. Each day Tim took Sheila to school and built her a fire of lath and coal. Before he returned, neighbors were coming in sleds with his pupils. Children wrapped like bundles and bales of merchandise were handed to Nell Connor, who received them, unwound them, and held snow to a nipped nose or rubbed numb feet.

The Connors' kitchen was enriched by the blackboard, the recitation bench, the chart, and the dictionary from the schoolhouse. As must be in such surroundings, school was rather informal. Robert Emmet and even Ellen joined classes, making the enrollment reach twenty-two.

There was really very little study done. Who could study when Tim Connor was conducting a class? How could one concentrate on the Battle of Bull Run while Tim was telling how to outwit the spell of the wee people? . . . "You reach down without ever taking

your eyes off them, pull a handful of grass, and throw it over your left shoulder . . ."

And again, the attention of the entire school might be called to something of note in a special recitation. "Childer, listen to this: *The land of the free and the home of the brave*. You don't understand what that means; but if you'd ever lived, as I have, in a country ruled by tyranny, you'd understand. Here in this land of ours, of course we have our troubles sent us as crosses from a hand on High; but if our present poverty was forced upon us by confiscation, I'd not be sitting here calmly, I'd . . ."

Nell, in the bedroom, cleared her throat several times.

Tim didn't notice.

What was he trying to tell those poor little German children who had come to learn how to read and write English? They weren't interested in Ireland's troubles. . . . They had troubles enough of their own.

"A sadder and a prouder country you never saw. So childer, you must thank God you're where you are today and not under the heel of an oppressor. *Sweet land of liberty*. It is a sweet land of liberty. Let's all sing that song now."

Nell chided Tim for his methods and informality. "You mustn't teach children those things."

"The truth, Nell, can't they learn the truth?"

"Yes, but it's not your business here now to criticise England. You're paid to teach 'em."

The children continued to listen to his voice. Younger ones learned how to parse, hearing the drill in more advanced classes. Older ones seldom turned a page or

scratched a pencil on a slate when the primary class was on the recitation bench.

"Fairies live in the Old Round Towers and do be out nights. One evening a hunchback was coming along, coming along . . ."

Often the kitchen rocked with laughter. Raucous, uncontrolled chuckles of adolescent boys mingled with the spontaneous mirth of younger children.

Thus the school time was pleasant enough, but Nell dreaded the noon hour; not that she resented its added bedlam, but she saw that some children had little or nothing to eat. "How I'd like to stuff their stomachs like ticks," she often said, but she could not—her own family was on rations.

Hendrika and Johnny Van den Hull had no lunch at all. There was no mother at Van den Hull's. She had gone away from the prairie to a place where there was something going on. "Where there is no mother, there's nothing," Nell concluded, "and the little grandmother may be sick." She gave the Van den Hulls something—a cup of mush, a drink of milk. Others followed her example, and they ate their portions avidly.

One day Hendrika and Johnny came with smiling faces. Hendrika had a basket, and Johnny hopped about whispering to the children. The little ones and the grandmother had not forgotten their friends. When Jake, the father, had received money from a relative and had bought flour and a few extras, they shared their good fortune. It was a real treat they brought—*Saint Nicholas* cookies, one for everybody. Nell saved hers for Sheila, who was nothing but a child.

. . . . . .

When the Connors' two wage earners had taught a month, many needed expenditures were made. They bought shoes, flour and groceries. Interest was met, and a small payment made on the team. Nell had sent for raisins, and what marvelous things can be created by an ingenious woman with an oven and raisins! Each day she had an extra for the children's lunch: and their round eyes often left their readers and centered on Nell as she bustled around the stove.

Max's wife came over one day and volunteered to aid in fixing a little Christmas party for them. She would give each child a stick of candy. Other mothers co-operated, and the day before Christmas was a memorable one.

Of course there were pieces and songs. Recitations were given in many dialects. Santa was Kriss Kringle, St. Nick, and Santy Claus.

Margaret closed . . . "Silent Night, Holy Night . . ." Margaret—tremulous lips, sweet voice, slim white face, soft brown hair, clear blue eyes fixed beyond the bedroom door.

"Christ our Saviour is born. . . ."

Quiet in the kitchen, a subdued quiet. Children, engrossed in eating, wrapped pink tongues around their sticks of candy and noted perceptible losses. Dutch Fred squeezed rosy apples out of his pockets—one for each.

Tim broke the stillness. "It's over, folks. Merry Christmas to ye all."

Little children bundled into sleds. Early dusk. Dutch Fred's deep voice leading others as they hitched their teams and swept away: "O tannen Baum, O-O-O tannen Baum . . ."

The Connors watched. Santa and reindeers! Christ Child would return to earth tonight! Would He come here to the prairie? It was cold and the full moon was lemon-colored and the world was white. Look! A bright star over Schwartz's grove!

Ellen scolded next day: "I don't like Mrs. Santa Claus. She stole poor Mom's good bonnet ribbon and made me a doll dress out of it."

"Ellen, you're a goose," Danny began.

"Danny!" Nell stood before him. "I declare, if you say a word to that child one way or another, I don't know what I'll do with you. Your good sense ought to be growing in proportion to your legs. Take that pail there and bring me in some water."

The children danced about. It was Christmas and there was duck for dinner! Santa Claus had found them; and they knew that the Christ Child, too, had come to the prairie, although they had not seen Him.

CHAPTER XXX

"YES, sir, time is a river flowing on and on . . ." Tim spoke out one evening from where he sat by the stove smoking his pipe. "One day leads right into another. There is no break in time—east or west. Sheila, we'll soon be through leading our flocks out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge."

Sheila, playing *cat* on a slate with Kitty Ann, did not answer.

"Sheila, it's you and meself that have the responsible positions around here. We're moneyed people. If we didn't have so many places to put it we could carry it about in our pockets."

Nell, in the adjoining room tucking in the younger children, also thought of time, the days passing. Before she rejoined the group in the kitchen, she knelt by her bed and thanked God. . . . January, that hard, cruel month with the thirty-one days, was over.

In Connors' neighborhood it was easy to be poor. Almost all were very poor. No one had a luxury. "One poor devil was worse off than the next." Whenever Tim and Nell Connor spoke of the difficulties of their lot, they soon heard of others who were worse off. Just when the winter terms closed and wages perforce discontinued, diphtheria broke out in the township.

Briedbarths, the family whose mother had consumption, now had black diphtheria! Liddie had it first and died in a few days. Everyone shunned the stricken home.

People out of doors would not breathe deeply when the wind blew from Briedbarths'.

Nell grieved for Liddie. "I welcomed that child into this world," she would go on. "I gave Liddie her first bath. There is no one to help bury her in decency." Finally she could be inactive no longer. "Someone must help! Of what use are lives if we can't risk them to save others. Go, Tim, and get Dutch Fred. He'll go over; he has no children. He has a kind heart. Have him call this way. I'll have a little dress ready."

The overskirt of Nell's wedding dress was of white bombazine. She ripped a generous width and fashioned a dress that fit Ellen—Liddie was the one age of Ellen.

When Dutch Fred came with a rough, little coffin under his arm, Nell went again to the bombazine skirt. She covered the box with another width, and lined it with her wedding veil.

The young Connors were amazed. Never had they been allowed to even touch that veil! And now. . . . But something unusual in the solemnity of Nell's face kept them from remonstrating.

As Nell worked, she advised Fred. "Tim'll send a doctor to the other children. And you'll stay there, won't you? The neighbors can look after your stock."

"I stay," he nodded.

"And come within calling distance if you need us for anything. Give 'em plenty milk and keep 'em warm. Tim will report their circumstances. The county'll help 'em, I know."

As Fred buttoned up his buffalo coat, after putting his long beard fondly inside, he started off.

Nell called after him: "May the Lord reward you, Fred, and keep you from catching it."

Dutch Fred buried Liddie, and nursed the stricken family. The less fearful neighbors brought milk frozen and wrapped in paper or cloth, left it at a safe distance from the house, and ran. Fred religiously followed the doctor's orders: he tied a stocking around each throat, and gave a teaspoonful of kerosene every two hours.

They lived.

The epidemic spread, but decreased in virulency. Katto saved her boys with onions. She poulticed them with onions and fed only onion soup. Some neighbors, not wishing to give Katto and her remedy full credit, argued that Schwartzes did not have it so bad: but Katto insisted that it was "black dipteery"—she could see the black in their faces.

The Connors prayed that they would be spared, and Nell's faith gave hope to all. "Pray, children, pray. Pray to your gardian angel."

"My guardian angel won't let me get it," Margaret said, convinced.

"My guardian angel won't let me get it," Kitty Ann repeated, "'cause she don't want to catch it her own self."

"Kitty, Kitty Ann, child, such talk," Nell reprimanded. "Don't be bold now."

The Connors were spared the diphtheria: and with the advent of spring, fear of the epidemic passed away.

Again settlers mustered up hopes, and the desire to gamble with the black soil stirred their blood. The state apportioned out seed. Stricken lands were exempted from taxes. "Seed early!" all were advised.

Would there be a harvest?

The roulette was spun! They could but await results.

Grasshoppers were still a menace, but their numbers were greatly reduced. Favorable winds had carried many away the previous year before they had deposited their eggs; prairie fires had helped to diminish them.

Summer showed promise of a partial crop. The Connors lost much of their barley and oats, but had a fine stand of wheat. Schwartz had a fair patch of corn. It was not for long, however, that the settlers were exultant, for a third combatant entered for possession of the crop—the mortgage!

They realized that a mortgage had strong propensities. Grasshoppers came and went, hail and blizzards visited and passed on, but the mortgage stayed. It did not mellow with age; indeed, it daily grew more savage, more vigilant, more remorseless.

Foreclosures were the order of the day. Shiny carriages, when seen on the horizon, filled Nell with awe. What if they were coming to foreclose *them?* What if they should demand the wheat for interest? The hammer would fall on them!

Steindler's section of land was free from mortgage; moreover, Max had cash in a tin box under his bed. Everyone thereabouts knew of his surplus, yet no one would ask for a loan. Max was humored as a child, and as his malady grew worse he became more tyrannical. Opiates only would calm him.

One day when Tim and Schwartz had been called to Steindler's to assist in his care—he was without sufficient sedative—a shiny carriage appeared in the neighborhood.

Nell was lulling Alice to sleep. Danny and Captain were off with the cattle, the young ones were in the grove, and Sheila was pulling the wild mustard from the wheat.

Sheila saw the strange carriage enter Schwartzes' yard. A few minutes later it drew up with a flourish at Connors' wheat field.

The girl—her brown feet moving carefully amongst the wheat, golden-red hair flecked with mustard pollen, face flushed with the heat of the day—bent her supple body, plucked stalks of mustard, and added them to the pile on her arm whose yellow blooms framed her face. The summer sunlight! A field of ripe wheat! A golden girl!

"Gawd, that's a sight," the man in the carriage mumbled. *Wild Mustard!* He called to the girl: "Wild Mustard, come out here."

Sheila made her way carefully out of the field.

"Good day, my beauty," the visitor said kindly, as he leaned over the buggy wheel.

Sheila dropped her eyes. Added color surged over her face and neck . . . a mortgage man was not so formidable as she had imagined.

"Dutch or German? How shall I twist my tongue?"

"English. Talk English," Sheila answered, her eyes risking a look at the team, whose skins were moist and shone like satin under the bright fly nets.

"Thank God for that!" the stranger answered good naturedly. "A man coming into these parts must have not only an interpreter but a shotgun. Woman over there next got after me with a pitchfork when I wanted to talk a little business with her. She told me the

various parts of my body that she would feed to the hogs. She looked like she might do it all right, so I put out."

"She would have," Sheila answered calmly.

The man took a list from his pocket. "What about Tim Connor? Is a man safe there? Gawd, that was an awful woman."

Sheila dropped the armful of wild mustard. Her throat ached from pollen. "Foreclosing?" she asked timidly.

"No," he answered, "Selling lightning rods! This his wheat? Fine crop of wheat. He should have money enough to protect his home and you, my beauty."

"Pop can't buy," Sheila answered. "He has no money."

"Oh, can't he, my beauty? Come for a little ride. No? Then, climb in here and we'll talk it over." Condescendingly, he reached for her hand.

Sheila drew back instinctively, like a colt from harness. The stranger was kind, his smile broad, his moustache oiled, his boots shiny. Still she was apprehensive of that look in his dark eyes; she had an impulse to run.

"Your folks now, Connors—" he began, as he jumped from the buggy with the reins over one arm.

Sheila backed away from him. He restrained her, holding her arm. "Oh, Wild Mustard," he said, amused. "Don't you ever want a lover?"

Yes, Sheila had been dreaming much of lovers; but this man was not a lover. He was a stranger! She tried to free herself. She was not quick enough. "No, you don't, Wild Mustard—" He had her in his arms.

"Sic 'em Cap! Sic 'em!" Sheila heard Danny behind her. Cap came bounding over the grass and jumped at her assailant. Long, flapping coat tails were the most alluring things in the world. Cap tore away a mouthful and came back again, but the man had taken refuge in his buggy. With an oath he picked up the reins and drove toward the house.

Nell met him in the yard.

The man removed his coat and said nothing of his last encounter. He began: "I had a very unpleasant stay at your neighbor's house. I hope this little call will be more pleasant. It will be." He tied his team to a tree.

Nell, arms folded, stood before him. Bully for Katto if she ran him off. May the Lord continue to give her courage! What was the man saying to her?

"And I met your daughter—she's a beaut—in the field and I think with a little coaxing that she would be willing to come and work for me. And I'm sure you'll think it is a very good plan all around. You see—I need the hired girl—you need the money." Ingratiatingly: "We can help each other in such hard times."

Nell, apparently calm, looked at the man. Her gray-blue eyes flashed like steel. "A good bit of water has gone under the bridge since I've seen the likes of you. If Tim was here he'd knock you down. If you have a man's business here, state it. Otherwise, be moving on."

The man was a bit chagrined. People were poor as Job's cats. Did they still have honor? And such pride! He had taken the wrong method, he realized that. He drew a paper from his pocket. "I have something of interest to progressive farmers," he began.

Danny, with Captain at his heels, had reached the

yard. The boy's eyes narrowed as they saw a paper in the man's hands. The horses pricked their ears at the dog.

"S-s-s—*sic* 'em," Danny said softly.

Captain jumped at the tassels of the fly nets; and, in one accord, both horses jerked their heads, broke the hitching strap, and were away on the prairie.

Danny dodged behind the granary, holding the dog. When the enraged man followed his team in an effort to catch them, Danny again released Captain; and dog and man and team disappeared in a fog of dust.

Day after day passed and the lightning rod man did not return. Nor did the loan man visit them to press his claim. The crops were harvested; and Connors had flour for the winter.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next spring there was little occasion to speak much of hoppers. The plague was practically over. Prosperity hovered in sight once more.

The railroad now became the chief topic of conversation. There was a new road venturing west, and many counties were offering a right of way. Jerome county was exulting in the report that it had received the railroad when word came that the line had swerved south, and that negotiations were being made with the Central Railroad to jointly build a track to the Missouri River.

Tim Connor, neglecting his fields, had spent much time in securing signatures for the right of way. This last report filled him with chagrin. "It do beat all. . . ."

"Something may come up yet," Nell consoled.

"I'll set no hopes on it. . . . Of course, there will be other roads later on."

"I suppose so, if we live long enough to see them."

While Tim renewed his energy putting in his tardy crop, Nell, also reconciled to the caprices of fortune, rejoiced in the more immediate sources of joy. It was spring-of-the-year for Nell. She went about her daily duties which included now: kitchen, chicken coop and garden. She sang. Snatches of songs. A little of this and a little of that. Crumbs of happiness.

She often stood in the yard and watched the bobbing heads of Jack and Jule as they pulled the seeder. The cultivated land was black, but the prairie grass was green, and light and shadows already had begun their

play across its wide sweep. Sticky yellow leaves curled out on the cottonwoods so that they resembled huge bouquets. The cactus, resting unscathed on the top of the overturned kraut barrel, showed no sign of blossom, but was taking on a more delicate green.

There was Steindler's knoll, beyond which Sheila disappeared each morning. Teaching. Coming home each evening with the younger brood of children to eat her out of house and home.

Danny, loose-jointed, long slim hands, husky voice, less a torment but retaining the twinkle in his eye . . . the spit of his father. He'd soon be demanding another school.

Margaret, more sensitive than ever, losing her freckles, secretly envious of Sheila, writing down little notions on bits of wrapping paper. "Poems," Tim called them; but poor child, they had no rhyme to them at all.

Kitty Ann, outgrowing her stumpiness, boasting that she could whip any boy her age, both Margaret's defender and persecutor, having feet that could improvise a dance to any tune her ear could catch.

Robert Emmet, a lovely child with a fine-shaped head, round blue eyes contemplating visions of Danny's world. A little outcast—classed with the older ones with whom he could not belong, because he had outgrown the younger ones. Ellen and Alice had a monopoly on Tim's knee, but occasionally Emmet drew near, sat astride Tim's boot, and called out: "Ride a cock horse."

"You're pretty big, Emmet. Hop off, now, that's the man, and we'll give wee Alice a ride."

Poor Emmet must be seen to a little more.

They were fine, healthy children . . . but how

would they rank with eastern cousins? Nell often pondered thus as she worked in the garden.

There was one section of this garden patch to which she gave special care. Daily she carried water to a few twigs. Fruit! Max's wife had sent away for currants and high-bush berries and had given her a few shoots. There were also three young maples and an elm which had been donated by a mover. The nurturing of these twigs was a delight. They were from the East. Would they grow? Would they thrive here in this prairie? . . . If eastern vegetation flourished here, why not transplanted children?

One day leaves curled out on the stick-like saplings and bushes. They were growing! Thank God. She knew that they would grow. Now if discouraging thoughts came in the future she would think of the success of this bit of garden . . . it would be a trysting place with hope. It must be given a chance, however, and not be rooted or scratched out. She made a fence of sticks to discourage the chickens; and spoke often of fencing the yard.

One spring evening as the Connor family was sitting outside the door listening to unrestrained prattling children and rustling cottonwood leaves, Nell complained anew of the freedom of the young hogs.

"The hogs do no harm," Tim argued.

"They have everything rooted up," Nell answered with irritation in her voice. "I can't have a sign of a flower. I declare, if they go down there and break my few young bushes, I'll break their backs. Now, Tim, that's fair warning. Max's always had a fence, and even

Katto has now. You could just get a little extra barbed wire. You'll be fencing fields soon."

"I have no time now to fence the yard. Maybe later on. Crop's behind as it is with that railroad bubble, and I'll have to do some fencing. Herd Law is being carried out this spring—"

"You get the wire and I'll fence it."

"I'll not get the wire and have you fence it."

This fence argument was dismissed, for a team had turned in from the trail.

"Max must be worse and Mary's after me," Nell speculated, standing up and slipping her feet into her old shoes. "If he's bad, Tim, you must come, too. I don't mind sickness, but this may be death. He can't last much longer. The poison'll soon reach his heart."

Tim's eyes were fixed on the team. They didn't step like Max's team! He walked with Nell to greet the guests, whoever they might be.

"Awful to say," Nell prattled, as she fixed her hairpins more securely in her hair, "but Max's wife'll have peace when he's gone,—not but what his death will be hard on her in her delicate condition and all. He's a bad head to her . . . handles all the money. Everything must be brought to his bed.—That's not Max's team. Could it be the mortgage, Tim?" Nell looked at her husband anxiously.

Tim swallowed—his Adam's apple expanding in his throat—and walked toward the strangers.

A man and a boy were in the buggy. In the dusk the man's long, dark sideburns gave his face a sinister look.

"Allen is my name. Tim Connor?"

"It is, sir," Tim answered solemnly.

"I'm out for a right of way for the railroad. How are you standing?"

"Right on me two feet, and you're welcome."

The stranger laughed, a hearty laugh in which there was a little of the diplomat. The Connor children heard it and were glad.

"You're the man we're after," Allen said, climbing down and shaking Tim's hand. "Old Ben, one of the road gang, sent me here to you—he dug a well for you once."

He knew Ben, the stranger did!

Followed an evening, a momentous evening in the life of Tim Connor and his family.

The horses, "dandy pacers," were cared for in the wreck of a stable.

"Safe enough, for the steeds," Tim said jokingly, "for if the thing does collapse there won't be much danger. There's nothing much to fall."

"The road'll get you plenty cheap lumber for a new barn," Allen answered suavely.

Nell set out a lunch: mush which had been simmering in a black kettle on the back of the stove, and milk.

All the Connor family stood around the table.

The strange boy, Edgar, about Danny's age or a little older, had dark, pensive eyes. Unabashed by the scrutiny he was receiving, he in turn searched out details about the room: the table above which was a row of blue eyes, a lamp sputtering in the night air. His father, noisily disposing of bowl after bowl of mush, and with milk running down his beard, talked. He talked of everything:

people, money, politics—and concluded each with the outburst: "That's mush, that is!"

And Nell, pleased, asked: "Won't you have some more?"

"A little, please."

After the meal, Tim and Allen sat in front of the house. Allen passed cigars, and they smoked and talked. The number about them dwindled as tired children stumbled into bed.

Nell lit the lantern and called Danny, saying: "Here, take the boy down and show him his bed. I've fixed one in the wheat bin."

Danny took the lantern and whispered: "What'll I say to him, Mom?"

"Oh, don't act like a greenhorn. Ask him if he isn't tired after his long trip, or something like that."

Danny approached the boy and together they went to the granary. Danny broke the stillness in an unnatural voice, "I presume you're quite tired after your long journey."

Edgar didn't answer for a moment. He jerked off his shirt and hung it on a nail in a two-by-four. "I'm not so all-fired tired, but I'm sleepier than the devil."

Bewildered, Danny found his way back to the house, listened to the voices of the men for a while, and then went off to his bed in the loft. *I'm not so all-fired tired, but I'm sleepier than the devil.*

The house grew dark. Nell withdrew from the doorway and was soon asleep. The men remained talking on the step.

Birds were twittering when Tim came into the room.

He called: "Nell, Nell," and shook her by the shoulder. His heart was glad. It was good news he was bringing to the woman who had shared with him so many griefs. "Nell, Nell, the road's coming through, and a town on our land! A railroad and a town coming to us, Nell."

Tim was asleep in an instant. It was Nell's turn to stay awake. She lay wide eyed, thinking, until Alice awakened, placed a chubby fist on the rung of the cradle, and joined the clamor of the hungry young birds.

The road coming and a town!

Tim explained more fully next morning. "Allen was sent out from Buffalo to supervise the building of the road. Crary, the former superintendent, got fired—he ignored our right of way, and then couldn't make terms with the Central further south. Now Allen is intending to push a road right through on its own hook. Right through Jerome county. Right through Low German township. And Ben told him of us and asked him to put a town on our land. It could be a mile further east be right, but the railroad has the saying of it—that's between ourselves. I tell you, that Allen is a fine man."

Allen made Connors' his headquarters for a few days, and Tim accompanied him to settlers on the west who would aid in pushing things through. The Hollanders were promised a town of their own ten miles from the one on Connors' land.

While Tim was away, Danny worked in the field. It was Margaret who took Edgar about the prairie and made him acquainted with her world. Edgar was pleased with her discoveries. He was anxious to be of some use about the farm, too, but Danny ignored him.

One noon he met Danny at the well as he was watering his team. "I presume you're tired after your long morning," he said roguishly.

Danny answered: "Not so all-fired tired, but I'm hungrier than the devil."

Both boys laughed. They were good friends after that. Edgar learned much of the life of a farm boy, and Danny in turn heard of school life in Buffalo.

"I'm going East some day," Danny said solemnly after one of Edgar's recitals.

"I'm going to get a farm and live somewhere in the West," Edgar answered.

Although Edgar enjoyed all the Connor children, it was obvious that Margaret was his favorite. Unlike other boys of Danny's acquaintance, who no doubt would have concealed this admiration, Edgar was very frank about it. As they sat talking on the platform of the well one evening, he said: "Gosh, Margaret's awful pretty."

Danny, taken by surprise that anyone should see in freckled-faced Margaret a sign of beauty, looked at his sister for the first time with the eyes of another. Margaret, her bare feet swinging from the back of the wagon box, was intently reading a book of Edgar's, her chin cupped in her hand, her dark eyebrows drawn in concentration, her frowsy brown hair framing her slim face.

"You're the first one that ever remarked her. Everyone goes wild about Sheila."

"Sheila's pretty, but she's coarse, awful coarse. Don't you think so?" Edgar said, imprinting the outlines of a

well-made boot heel in the soft ground. "My father and I guessed that she did not belong to you folks, before we were told."

What was this world coming to? thought Danny Connor. A train! A town! And now this boy from back East speaking like that! *Margaret pretty! Sheila coarse!*

"Coarse?" Danny repeated—Mom had said that Katto was coarse. "Sheila's not coarse. She's a lady." Fire flashed from his eyes. A paleness disfigured his face. His jaw was rigid.

Edgar, though only one year older than Danny, felt very much his senior for the moment. "Well, don't you see? It's because I like Margaret best," he dismissed it.

Danny didn't see, nor did he care to see. Mom knew Sheila best and Mom had said that she was a lady. Why, even Indians liked Sheila. Coarse. . . .

Edgar thought it best not to mention Danny's sisters to him again; but he wrote a little verse to Margaret. Margaret, in turn, wrote one for him. Tim, upon hearing of the lad's poetic tendencies, nicknamed him Edgar Allan Poe.

Comments and raillery on the mutual admiration and common interest of Edgar and Margaret were the cause of much bolted food, until one day Tim "put a stop to it."

"When I was young," Tim began, "I craved to write verses; and every attempt I made me brothers laughed at me. I'm sorry now I didn't go ahead in spite of 'em. See here. We'll let these childer alone. A poem, to me—" Tim stood erect and his deep-set blue eyes were fixed on something distant in the fields—"a poem, to me, is

music . . . it is more . . . it is a bit of Divinity captured for just a fleeting second and released again. Let the childer alone." He pulled out his chair. "We'll have no more tormenting whatever."

All were silenced, even Mr. Allen himself.

"Pop always pets Margaret," Danny complained afterwards to Kitty Ann.

"And Mom always pets Sheila," Kitty Ann added. "No one ever pets me."

CHAPTER XXXII

IT was Saturday evening, a few days after the Allens had gone on negotiating farther west, when Ben, the well-digger, drove into Connors' yard.

"Ben!" all shouted; but the younger ones drew away from him. Robert Emmet stood abashed at his greeting: "Let me see if I can show you the Black Hills."

He recognized each one of them and had an extra word of greeting for Alice, "the grasshopper baby," whom he had never seen. He had business, he said, with Nell and Tim.

"We're laying out a few more towns soon now," he began, as the family sat in front of the house, "and right away you must have buildings here. The depot, of course, the road will build, and it will be permanent. Other buildings such as grog house, eating house and the like, will move away with us. There's chances here right now for the right kind of men. Get someone in here with a store and post-office. A saloon, too, and a lumber yard. I'd like to see you in the lumber yard, Tim—that's where the money is. Road's hauling lumber and the carpenters are moving with it. Put up a big barn here so they'll know where the town is for miles around." Ben looked about at the cluster of frail buildings, black in the dusk. "You need a barn and a house, too."

Tim unfolded his long legs and said nothing.

Ben leaned more closely, raising a horny hand. "You got to do it, Tim. Road expects some help in boosting a town. Others would be right glad of the chance."

"Let others try it," Tim snapped.

"You're foolish, man. Think of your wife and children. It's your one opportunity, and the road will be back of you. Settlers are following us, needing houses. Crops are good."

Tim did not comment.

"I asked Allen to plant the town here, Tim, because I remembered all of you here: and I wondered about you, too, when I heard of the hoppers. I never once thought that you'd leave, and I was right."

Tim could not reply.

"How did that lovesick German come out who was counting his cornstalks?" Ben changed his mood.

"Hung himself," broke in the children in chorus, as the parents hesitated.

Ben turned to the children. "Well, he was the kind that would do such a thing. Not ready to meet the old world as it turns around. And the artist with the profane mother? Family stuck, did they?"

They told of Herman, recounted the details of Johann's death, and the coming of Wild Goose. "And he was a good Indian; didn't scalp our heads or nothing. The place where you got scalped is bigger now."

Ben smiled and rubbed his hand over his bald head—he had only a fringe of gray hair now.

"And Herman is a cowboy and he's coming home soon for a visit," they added.

"So Sheila hasn't been carried off yet. Well, all in all, you've weathered it pretty well, considering . . ." Ben said thoughtfully. "You've been here hoping and praying for better things and now you won't grasp the opportunity when it comes." He stood for a few minutes

staring at the tops of the trees and at the stars; then he moved out of the group. From the edge of the grove he asked: "Who got Johann's land?"

"Max got that," Tim answered. "It stayed idle for a while. Then it was put up for the taxes. When Max heard of the railroad coming he paid the taxes and got the land."

"I'll bet yuh. That's the kind of a man that would take a chance and help himself while he aided the railroad."

"Why is Ben mad at us? Doesn't he like us any more?" the children asked.

No one replied.

After a silence, Nell began: "I believe, Tim, in the name of God, we should consider what Ben says. He's for our good."

"Easy to talk, woman, when we have neither credit nor money."

"Well, others along the road had neither credit nor money, and they made out. Ben knows our circumstances well enough, and he wouldn't insist if he didn't know it was the thing to do. I believe the man is disgusted with us."

"Disgusted he'll be, then."

"Well, we prayed so much, Tim, for success here and for a decent living for our children, and now maybe our prayers are being answered. I'm willing to take a chance. We can't be any poorer than we are. I think it's what we're to do. The hand of God seems to be behind it all—Allen coming and Ben directing him here and all."

"It's truly provoking you are at times. But I'll not quarrel with you over it."

Danny spoke up. "Well, if the town's on our land, Pop, won't they have to buy the land? That'll be some money. And if the buildings go up why can't you sell them the lumber? That'll be money, won't it? Maybe Ben'll go in with you, Pop. Since he's got money, and if it will make as much as he says. . . ."

Tim looked sideways at his son. He was no longer a little child to be hushed up, but a long boy sprawling on the ground saying something in a husky voice that was provokingly sensible.

"If I make a little," Tim answered, "they'll be after me like hounds. Me harvester note is due this month, and something must be done on the mortgage."

"Pay up the things with the money, Pop, and maybe you'll get credit then."

"That's the eye," a voice sounded from the yard, and Ben joined them again. He took his place once more before the door. "Right smart son you got there, Tim, and you don't know it." He leaned forward facing Tim, his fringe of hair white in the moonlight. "Tim, you're a fine man and an honest man. Now would it be fair for you to let your wife's wishes and your son's plans go without at least a trial? That would not be honest, Tim, and I know you to be honest, too blame honest for your own good."

Tim smiled at that. Cynically: "We'll see, Ben, we'll see."

"We *will* see. And I do have a little, too, as Danny said, and into the pot it'll go to show you where my faith is." And Ben raised sleepy Robert Emmet so that he rested comfortably in his arms.

As a climax to the auspicious evening, a black horse

from which streamed colored ribbons stopped before Connors' door. Its rider, likewise bedecked, drew out a revolver and shot once into the air.

The Connors were invited to a Low German wedding!

"It's Heinie Keister's and Clara Hebbing's wedding," Nell guessed.

"Yes, that's Clara's brother on the horse." Tim agreed as he waved, thereby accepting the invitation.

"They'll have a big time," Nell went on. "It's two years now since we had a real wedding here. It does my heart good to see 'em celebrating again. Low German weddings mean prosperity."

Indications of a good harvest! The railroad! A town! The neighborhood was completely revolutionized. This section of the country, despite the ill fortune of past years, was determined to show other districts who were really progressive "when given half a chance."

Allen called for volunteers to hasten the road through. People responded, giving teams and extra help.

As settlers plowed their corn and saw the grain ripen, their thoughts were on the town, on the road, and they felt the elation and excitement which accompanies unusual progress.

Tim began building his barn, and the townsmen their store buildings. . . . What would the town be called?

Anyone interested was asked to propose a name; and a committee consisting of Connor, Allen, Schwartz, Van den Hull, and Dutch Fred was to judge. In all forty names were suggested—*Connorstown* being the choice of many. Tim didn't want that name "Connorstown";

instead, he favored *Casvales.* This name was suggested by an ingenious railroad hand who had combined the first letter of the surnames of the committee and the new tradesmen in the town. *Casvales:* Connor—Allen—Schwartz—Van den Hull—Altman (the hotel-keeper)—Lustfield (the saloon-keeper)—Engelke (the store-keeper)—Schuknecht (Dutch Fred).

"Wouldn't Casvale be more euphonious?" Allen asked blandly after all had been settled.

Tim shook his head at him. "We've voted now. And Dutch Fred, the old standby, must not be omitted."

"It's your town," Allen said, laughing.

"So it is," Tim answered, and the committee nodded agreement.

While the railroad was still miles away, Casvales appeared in white lettering on a diminutive red depot.

Max Steindler raged at the method used in selecting a name. Did he not own six hundred and forty acres of land, besides Johann's one hundred and sixty, bordering the town? Was he not an early settler?

Dutch Fred called to see him, and Max raved at this grievance. The visitor bowed over the bed, his long beard commingled with Max's, and consoled him: "The last *s* is for Steindler. Didn't you know that?"

Max was satisfied.

When Dutch Fred was chided by Schwartz for giving away his *s*, he answered: "Oh, Max he won't live long. That don't hurt. Max he can have that *s* until he dies once. Then I take it back again."

Accustomed now to having strangers come into the yard at any hour of the day, the Connors were not startled when a cowboy swooped in from the trail. It

was Herman Schwartz, they knew, but he bore little resemblance to the former Herman. He had the same quizzical smile, but the restless expression in his eye had changed to a brazen look. The bull whackery had left its mark. He alighted easily, held the check strap, and shook hands with a sort of swagger.

Sheila was shy.

Herman, noting this, grew bolder and patronizing. "I told you I'd come back for you, Sheila. Pretty as ever. . . ." He winked at Tim as though they shared some secret. "Saw lots of 'em that look like you, but you got them beat."

Nell rescued her. "Sheila is a teacher now, Herman."

"Teacher? Glad she is. Cowpunchers don't stoop to nobodies."

"Herman, you're joking." Nell could hardly be convinced that he was serious. "Be your own self again," she begged. "Don't you paint and draw any more?"

"Naw," with a guffaw. Looking around, he said: "It's the same old shiftless dump."

"Going to stay here long?" Tim broke in. "Lots of work here."

"Yes, guess I'll dig and grade a while to bring in the road; but by winter I'll be off again. I'd die around here."

"We don't want to be the cause of your death," Tim said, laughing. Herman was in the saddle again.

"Going over to see Max's girls. I'll show them once what a cow punch looks like. S'long," and he was off, his small buckskin pony kicking up the dust on the trail.

A sadness came over Nell Connor as she walked back to the house. Does the country make the man, or the

man make the country? There was gentle, stammering Herman, an artist—a hard-looking man now, a braggadocio, talking lightly to Sheila as her equal, yes, as her superior. How gratifying it was to see Sheila resent his boldness!

"I thought cowboys were different," Danny said disgustedly.

"He, I believe, is one dressed up for the occasion," Tim said, amused.

"Ben was a cowboy once and he wasn't like Herman."

"Herman's young yet; he'll learn," Tim answered.

The community, while rejoicing in unprecedented bustle—the railroad moving nearer each day, a town, a post-office, an abundant harvest—was made to pause for a short time to bury Max. Max, the master of his house, lay dead in the darkened parlor. It was strange that in that house of death voices were raised and lowered at will. A tension was released. There was sorrow, a sorrow permeated with a subdued peace.

Nell and Tim were with him during his last hours, Nell comforting his wife in an adjoining room, Tim sitting by the sick bed. It was at dawn, and after such a long silence that Tim thought the sick man would speak no more, Max said: "Box."

Tim drew out the indicated box from under the bed and opened it, thinking that perhaps Max wished to make a will.

Max indicated a roll of bills and a document—the deed to Johann's land. "Give to Sheila," he said. "I—

I know the father, and the mother is Indian. The name is there—Sheila's."

That was all.

In a short time the bushy-haired man was at peace. Not until then did Tim realize the significance of Max's words. Sheila an Indian! Ben had hinted that long ago, but he had not understood. Tim looked down at the deed in his hands. The roll of bills! "I know the father." Tim understood. The red-haired Max was her father! There was the name: "*Shaylah win.*" Indian! The very name the child had given on her arrival. It had sounded like Sheila Winnie. There was no surname. . . poor Sheila had quite a heritage.

As Tim performed the duties of a neighbor in a house of death, he thought that if he had to choose between Sheila's parents he would choose the unknown Indian. But one cannot select parents. Neither should he censure the dead.

As the settlement again resumed its varied interests, Tim was troubled with the secret of Sheila's legacy and parentage. The truth, he knew, must be made known to a few at least. He dreaded telling it, and to Nell most of all. But one day while they were alone in the kitchen, he told her of the inheritance and the paternity—he did not mention the mother.

Nell steadied herself against the table. Her throat grew dry. Sharp pains darted through her swollen ankles. "Tim, you're fooling," she said finally, searching his face. "Surely that old grizzly bear . . . the father of such a mild, sweet girl. Well, it had to be someone. Sheila, no doubt, is like her mother, whoever she may

be. . . . I'd like to know the mother. . . . His coloring of the hair—"

"There he was all these years," Tim interposed, "living in lashins and lavins: and Sheila and ourselves—"

"Well, it was God's will, Tim, that's all I have to say."

"The land'll come in handy for her," Tim comforted.

But the quarter section of land meant little to Nell. She had lost her respect for land. In the past years the more land people had the poorer they were. She tried, however, to forget about Max and to consider the land as a means of sending Sheila to school. Yes, Sheila could go back East to school now. And Nell saw Sheila bearing a standard and carrying all the other Connors in her wake. "Poor Sheila," she said, "with such a father. And he settling right beside us . . . the world is small after all. And isn't it strange, Tim, it's Johann's land? Poor fellow! Well, 'tis a queer world. And did Max tell you all that the night he died? And think of his wife—poor woman."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MIDSUMMER found the town of Casvales in a whir of industry. Stores and homes, both permanent and temporary, were being erected in the stubble where Connor lately had grown barley.

Sand for plaster was being hauled from a pit in Sioux county. In the Connor yard the skeleton of a pine barn shouldered above the grove. As Ben had ordained, it indicated the location of the town for miles around.

Harvest was at its height: there was a heavy yield. Commingled with whirring harvesters were pounding of nails, sawing of boards, intermittent whistles of the distant locomotive, shouting of men, laughter of Ellen and Alice in the pile of shavings, slamming of the new screen door, pumping of water, rattling of dishes, and the discordant bawling of Bluey, whose calf was lost on the prairie. Above this pageant of prosperity the summer sun glowed, and a south breeze stirred its golden light until it shimmered before the eye.

Nell, her graying hair smoothed back from her full, high forehead and rolled in a tight knot, her wrapper open at the throat and gathered about the waist with a checkered apron, her eyes clear and alert, cooked for carpenters, harvesters, and children. Her heart was grateful for the scene before her. Her rugged constitution gloried in accepting a share of the ceaseless industry; only her limbs rebelled and grew numb in the long hours of duty. Evenings, however, brought a respite. While the men smoked and relaxed, Nell went off to

bed, where she fell asleep immediately, often not to waken until duties of a new day began once more.

One warm afternoon as Nell prepared an early supper, she anticipated a long, restful evening, as Tim and the men were going over to see the progress made on the road; but supper dishes were scarcely put away when Max's Annie drove into the yard and summoned Nell to the bedside of her mother—her hour was at hand. Nell left immediately; Tim, Danny, and Margaret accompanied the men who drove away in the wagon, wagering and speculating as to whether or no the road would reach the town in a month. Kitty Ann and Robert Emmet were out looking for Bluey's calf. Sheila was alone with Ellen and Alice. She put the little girls to bed and sat down on the doorstep.

Sheila was tired, too tired, she told them, to go over and see the road. In her heart she knew that she cared little for the road. In a month a train would pull into the town, and there would be a celebration. The railroad would run through her land, the land which Pop had bought from Max with money received from her real parents—so Pop had said. Who were her real parents, anyway? Whoever they were, they had entered her life again and had given her property from which she would procure an income. The Connors would send her to school now. Why should her real parents, so long dead, rise from their graves and ally themselves with Mom? Why should they interfere? Why should everyone, everything, unite to restrict and confine her more and more as she grew older? Now when she wanted freedom, more freedom!

She looked into the bright night for answer. The air

was heavy with dew; stars were clear and distant. Kitty Ann's and Robert Emmet's arguments grew louder as they neared the house.

"I didn't go over near Johann's shanty," Robert Emmet made excuse. "I saw—maybe banshees there."

"Oh, Emmet, Pop's only fooling 'bout banshees. Besides, fairies 're only in Ireland."

"I heard 'em though; but maybe it's a girl singing there like Wild Goose said. You know, about the girl in the lake one time."

"Oh, them's all lies. Danny said so."

From the direction in which the children were coming, Sheila heard the bleating of the calf. She stood, released her braids of hair which duty had required her to fasten up on her head before supper, and opened the collar of her dress. The cool air eased the stifling in her throat occasioned by the thought of the future. Why did Mom insist that she teach school and go away to school, when there was a big world here to roam . . . and a lover somewhere waiting!

"Go to bed, children," she said, "and I'll go and look for the calf."

She stood for an instant listening. . . . Only the sounds of evening: a mourning dove in the willows, the prolonged bellow of Bluey, a cricket, the children quarreling over the wash basin: "I was washing my feet, and you . . ."

Sheila passed the gaping, silent barn, the thatched shed where mud swallows chirped sleepily and pigs gave an occasional grunt, through barley stubble where pine buildings shone spectral, out to the wild hay land.

It was moonlight on the prairie. The moonlight was

more than mere light: it was the essence of the air. It flooded the earth.

Sheila raised her skirts from the heavy dew and breathed deeply of the night, pausing, listening, waiting. There was no sound. The moonlight enveloped her, cutting her off from the earth; the Connors, teaching, books, lumber yard, railroad, seemed far away indeed. In this wild, unbroken land she was *free!* She extended a hand, hoping to restrain the old life. It must not again overpower her! Raising her face to the light, she anticipated, she longed for—she knew not what. Her heart beat wildly.

The white air shifted slightly and a figure stood before her. The sheen of dew was on his black hair, and his eyes—his eyes had caught hers and were holding them. A faint smile broke the tenseness of his look. He folded his arms. "Sun-in-the-Hair. You are waiting."

And Sheila, knowing him to be an answer to all the unspoken wishes and desires of her life, advanced a step. He moved; and she was enfolded in arms hard as iron.

"Sun-in-the-Hair."

Sheila's heart answered: "My deliverer, I will follow." Her lips said: "I—I was waiting—looking—" Disengaging herself: "Did you hear a little calf bleating?" At mention of the prosaic calf a flood of duty and remorse swept over her. Mom! Her advice! Her warnings! Oh, what have I done!

Her heart answered: "I don't care—I don't care."

Wild Goose was speaking, saying something about the little calf. He turned.

After the white air had swallowed him, Sheila stood waiting. She knew that she should remain there, but

remorse had cut away the moonlighted world. The indiscretion of her surrender assumed gigantic proportions; it overpowered her. She turned and ran towards Connors' house. As her skirts swished through the stubble, she imagined that she was being pursued. She hastened her steps. Out of breath, she reached the yard, to find a horse there. Herman, too: he came to meet her.

"Gosh, Sheila, ain't this moonlight? You ought to have seen the moonlight on the Pacific Ocean." Herman was less overbearing than on his previous visit.

Sheila sank down on the doorstep. "They're all gone away over to the railroad," she answered irrelevantly.

"But it's you I came to see," Herman said, taking a seat beside her. "But you won't look at a fellow."

Sheila leaned her head against the door. "I'll talk to you some other time. I'm tired, too tired tonight, Herman."

Seeing her physically spent, he commented: "Huh, they make you work like hell here, don't they? Can't even talk to a fellow. Now I want to talk to you about things. You and me were always good friends when we were young, weren't we?"

Wild Goose will be coming with that calf! Wild Goose!

"Go now, Herman," she begged, "and come some other time. Please go, Herman. I'm—go on, Herman."

Herman, with feigned gallantry, whisked off on his horse; Wild Goose stepped from behind the barn with the calf across his shoulders.

Sheila raised her face, but failed in her attempt at the explanation she thought due.

He answered: "Calf needs milk." With his assurance and presence, peace of mind returned to her.

"Bluey is my cow," she told him, as they released the calf. And she led her guest to the doorstep before which so many air castles had been builded, shattered, and builded again.

They spoke little; but much was said in their silence. Thoughtless crickets chirped. Unknowing bullfrogs croaked. The dove in the willows ceased to mourn.

At the rumble of the wagon, Sheila and Wild Goose rose to their feet. Wild Goose caught Sheila in his arms. When he attempted to release her, she clung to him. "Take me away now," she begged. "Take me with you."

Wild Goose did not reply immediately. He pursed his lips into her hair, then raised his eyes to the sky.

On just such starlit nights he had roamed the prairie of Dakota and had prayed to the Great Spirit to show him how to win Sun-in-the-Hair in the white man's way. And the Great Spirit had heard his prayer. He would never carry away a white girl! And Kind Woman must not grieve. In a measure he sensed Nell's depth of feeling on that trip to Casper Center a few years before. Kind Woman had said: "Lena and Lou must go before the priest." As in panorama, that night in all its solemnity and significance passed before his eyes.

He raised his lips from Sheila's hair, and spoke as though to the stars: "Kind Woman must not grieve. We will go first before a white father. Kind Woman—"

"Mom, you mean? She won't let me go!" Sheila argued, sobbing. "If I tell her she won't let me go."

The voice of Wild Goose was calm and convincing. "Kind Woman will not say no. Wild Goose will tell her now—"

The wagon was drawing near.

"She's not with them: she's over to Max's. They're coming! Go, Wild Goose, go!"

"Wild Goose will go. You tell him, your father, then. You tell him before the moon dies tonight."

"Go now. I'll—I'll tell him," she said hesitantly.

But Wild Goose was authoritative. "Before this moon dies tonight."

Sheila went to her room, where Kitty Ann lay ensconced on a patch quilt, her white arms encircling her head. Was that Kitty Ann? Yes, *that was Kitty Ann.* As she placed the child in her proper one-third of the bed, she dreaded the talk with Pop. It was well that Mom was not there: Mom would not understand. But with this dread, the joy of life, sweet life, throbbed in her subconscious self. Wild Goose was master. There could be no difficulties. The small bedroom was strange. The pictures: *Waiting for the Tide at Venice,* Mom's Uncle Henry—what were they? Shadowy survivals of a childhood that was gone, a life that was over.

Margaret rushed in excitedly. "Road's clear up to Mill creek! They're putting in a bridge there! Think of it, Sheila! By threshing time we can see them working! Danny's going to be waterboy next week!"

That was Margaret! Yes, Margaret, another Connor. A girl almost as tall as Sheila herself, slender, vivacious, with blue eyes flashing, red lips parted, and a braid of brown hair switching her back. Yes, that was Margaret.

"But don't tell Mom." Margaret was still speaking: "But Danny's going to drive the engine into town that day. Of course the engineer will be right beside him. Ben did it. He asked Mr. Allen. Sheila, Edgar was there tonight, and I got another book. He sent clear to Buffalo for it so I could read it. Say, Sheila, what's the matter with you? You look so different. Are you sick or something?"

"No, I'm not sick. Get down on your knees and pray for me while I talk to Pop. Pray, Margaret—you can pray better than I. I'll tell you why later on; but pray now, Margaret, on your knees."

Alarmed, Margaret obeyed.

Seeing her kneeling beside the bed, Sheila went out and closed the bedroom door.

Tim was sitting on a chair in the kitchen, taking off his boots.

How could she tell him? *Wild Goose was an Indian.* She glanced out the door. What if the moon had set and she had not obeyed!

"See ye found the calf." Tim was patting the sole of a boot as he emptied its chaff into the cob box.

"Yes."

Tim looked up quickly. "Trouble, Sheila? Anything wrong? Any word from Max's?"

"No." Why should Sheila now be overpowered with a flood of reminiscences? Never before had she been so aware of Pop's liberality, his understanding. He had never failed her. She recalled many of the sacrifices that he had made for her. How vividly she could remember the day of her arrival years before! Pop had poured out

the kerosene from that lamp so that Mom might cleanse her hair.

She could not speak. She stood by the table and with a forefinger diligently traced a pattern in the new oilcloth which had been bought on the arrival of carpenters.

"Not wanting to go off with Herman, are yuh?" Tim said as a joke.

"No—not Herman."

"Who? Has any of the carpenters been throwing sheep's eyes?"

"No—it's Wild Goose."

"Wild Goose! Sure, he hasn't been here the past year."

"He was here tonight."

Tim stood before her. The clock ticked, ticked; the lamp wick responded to a whiff of wind and made a quivering in the light and shadows of the room.

"Do you like Wild Goose pretty well?" Tim laid a hand on her shoulder. He raised her face.

Sheila flung herself into his arms, sobbing. "I—guess, I love him, Pop. I want to go with him anywhere—to the end of the earth."

Tim was staring at the floor, staring and holding his breath—another girl had said those same words. "We won't stand between you and your happineses, Sheila, but it will be hard on Nell."

Encouraged, the girl went on. "I don't care for teaching and schooling. Your young ones can have my land—and I know I love him better than Mom or anybody . . . and Pop, I would have gone away with him to-

night if he would take me. He wants you and Mom to know of it and for us to marry before a priest."

"Thank God, child, some one of you had sense. That would have killed Nell, and you know it. Nell has placed great stock in you. We'll see, Sheila. I'll have a talk with the young fellow. Over to Johann's shanty, I suppose. I wish he'd come and go like a white man . . . I'll tell him so."

"You won't send him away!" Sheila withdrew from Tim's arms. Dark fires which had been smoldering in her eyes flashed now.

"No, Sheila. Nell and meself'll stand by you. Say nothing of it for the present."

Danny, tall and loose-jointed, ambled into the house, slamming the screen door with a generous swing.

At his step Tim turned to wind the clock.

"I'll be glad when we get a house where I won't have to sleep in a cupola," the boy complained. "I'm going out in the barn soon as the roof's on."

Tim, in response, wound the old clock, and it gyrated noisily. Sheila poked at the ashes in the stove and laid cobs for the morning fire.

Danny, ignoring the ladder stairway, swung himself into the loft by his arms.

"Sheila," he called down, "you should have seen Herman. He's not a cowboy tonight; he's a jimdandy. He was over there at Beavers' when we passed, talking to Louisa. He can have Louisa Beaver. He thought all he had to do was to come back and take you. You had better not have anything to do with him. Train men don't like him. You should hear him brag; you'd think

he discovered the Rocky Mountains." Shoes dropped on the floor. "Bet you if he saw that young Indian now he'd run faster than ever, and hide a few more years."

"Oh, dry up, Danny," Tim commented. "Give us a rest with your Herman. Get some sleep now, or you will be a mile behind the binder tomorrow. Can't expect to be a waterboy next week if that shocking isn't done."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE next morning Pete Schwartz stopped at Connors' and told them that the wife of Max had a son.

On hearing this, Tim hitched Ned to the sulky and dispatched Kitty Ann for Nell. Max's wife had daughters there to look after her, he reasoned, and Nell was needed at home: there were things that must be told her soon. Tim had not slept during the night. At times he was tempted to seek out Wild Goose in the deserted shanty, but he finally decided that it would be better, perhaps, to bide his time.

Kitty Ann braced her sturdy legs against the lattice-bottomed sulky and urged Ned toward Max's. She anticipated something extraordinary, she hardly knew what. But births were often accompanied by unusual events. Now, when Pop was born in Ireland the year of The Big Wind, the waves of the ocean flopped right up on the land and left fish there. When Alice was born, the land was brown with grasshoppers. And her own birth, she felt, was especially favored. She associated it with the legend told among pioneer women, how on one occasion a young mother, alone to greet her child, was visited by the Mother of God, who, mindful of Bethlehem, came and administered to her.

There was nearly always mystery connected with new babies, she concluded, as she brought the reins down sharply on old Ned's back. But Ned was as unfeeling as he was sightless. He had one gait and no more.

This Kitty Ann knew, but she continued to urge him by standing and slapping him with the reins.

There was nothing unusual in Max's yard. In the house, Mom was dressing Max's son—he wasn't much to see; he was red and scrawny. Katto was there, sitting close by, "jawing Mom."

"What for your Sheila don't make up to my Herman?"

Nell gently inserted a very small fist into a flannel sleeve, and answered: "Oh, Katto, they're too young to be serious. They both have a great life ahead of 'em before they think of getting married. We're figuring on sending Sheila East to school in the fall."

Mary Steindler interposed from the kitchen where she was kneading bread: "You say Sheila shall go to school. Sheila does not like school. You are boss over Sheila, I guess."

"Gosh, she's homely," thought Kitty Ann. "And fatter than Mom!" Kitty Ann was standing between the two rooms, leaning against the jamb, one bare foot atop the other.

Mary had been more sullen since her father's death, while Annie and Katie were buoyant and gay in their new freedom. These two were on their way to town this morning, so Kitty Ann could not talk to them.

"Oh, Sheila will like it when she gets acquainted; it's just homesickness she's afraid of," Nell ignored Mary's thrust.

Katto leaned back in her chair. "Well, Herman he is a smart one, too, but, by Gutt, he don't have to go to Massachusey to get his brains. He don't want to be artist any more, but he has a good time."

Max's wife smiled on the group, her tanned skin leathery on the bleached pillow case. She called Kitty Ann to her and whispered: "Tell Mary once I say that she shall give you orange."

Katto, with lowered voice, spoke again to Nell. Their argument apparently was at an end. "Max is dead and now he got a boy."

"Yes, Katto: it's a queer world, whatever." Nell wrapped the baby in a shawl and placed it beside its mother. "I'll be going now," she said to Mrs. Steindler. "If you want me send over and I'll come."

Max's wife could not speak. Tears rushed from her eyes and down her furrowed cheeks.

Kitty Ann was circling around Mary in the kitchen. Mary was kneading the bread with vengeance, and her coil of red hair nodded as if to say: "You won't get an orange. You're afraid to ask for it."

Kitty Ann accepted the challenge. "Mary," she said.

Mary's broad back did not turn. The coil of red hair nodded wickedly.

"Mary—your mother said—I could have an orange."

Mary did not heed.

Katto's round figure filled the doorway. "Mary," she said, "your mother say that you shall give Kitty an orange."

"Well, can't you wait once till I get my hands from dough?" Mary answered in ill humor.

"Come along, Kitty Ann," Nell called, "we'll be going."

Mary continued to knead vigorously.

Max's wife called meekly from the bedroom. Thereupon Katto went to the cupboard, unearthed an orange,

and handed it to Kitty Ann. "Mary," she said ironically, "too bad, by Gutt, that some man don't know how you like to mix bread."

After Nell and Kitty Ann had started out in the road cart, Kitty Ann made a "hollow" in her calico lap and deposited the orange peel as she ate the juicy center.

"Poor Mary, I wish she could take a trip and visit somewhere when her mother is better." Nell said thoughtfully.

"Who would ask her to visit?—I wouldn't," Kitty Ann commented.

"Child, have you eaten all the orange? Why didn't you save a quarter for the others?"

"I'll take them some peelings." Kitty Ann answered. She scooped a piece automatically now, making parallel furrows with her two permanent frontals.

"Don't take them anything, then. Say nothing to them at all about it."

Kitty Ann scooped all the peel and tossed it over her head—all except one small piece which she secreted in the pocket of her apron. She wouldn't tell them she had had an orange. No. But as soon as all were with her she would accidentally find this bit of peel and say: "What is this? Oh, yes . . ."

While Nell lightly swung her feet over the sulky wheel and alighted, Tim, on a pretext of getting a drink of water, came into the yard. Together they viewed progress made on the barn: then with a significant nod Tim drew Nell behind the haystack. He didn't speak at once. His eyelids quivered, and beads of sweat stood on his face.

"For God's sake, what's wrong, Tim? Out with it. I felt as though something was up when you sent for me."

"It's Sheila, Nell. It's really two things."

"No one's harmed her, have they?"

"No—Nell, no."

"Well, then, tell me *anything*." Nell looked rather defiantly at her husband.

It was hard for Tim. He shifted his weight, pulled a straw of bluejoint from the haystack and chewed it thoughtfully. "I always felt this day would come."

"Out with it."

"First, Nell, I'll tell you that her mother was an Indian."

"Max told you that, did he?"

"He did; and I've carried the secret around with me since."

Nell turned pale. She closed her eyes for an instant. "I'd never think that, Tim. That's what Max had to humble me—but he won't humble me . . ."

"People boast of Indian blood," Tim consoled. "You remember Cutlers in Springfield, don't you?"

"Yes, I remember Cutlers in Springfield. The other thing, Tim. It's not that Herman's coming here . . . Sheila doesn't care about Herman."

"Wild Goose—"

"Go on, Tim, I'm prepared for anything now."

"Wild Goose is here again—and she tells me she wants to go away with him. Wouldn't that chestfounder you?"

Nell swayed a little and steadied herself against the haystack.

Tim went on: "She told me last night. She loves

him, she says, and met him here last night. I told her nothing of her mother; but promised her we'd do as we always have—stand by her."

"Wild Goose!—That savage!—Sheila!—"

"Don't go too hard on him, Nell. Sheila would have gone away with him—"

"Glory be to God . . ."

"—but he refused to take her. I guess of the two he has the more character."

"You talk of character, Tim, in one so young. She's so young, you see, so young." Nell turned away. The white barn swam before her eyes; the house came toward her. On entering the kitchen she leaned against the wall.

Margaret was peeling potatoes, and Sheila was scrubbing the floor. Nell's eyes lingered on Sheila, her perfectly formed shoulders and hips. *Carrying the heaviest burden. The coldest place in the tent.* Aloud she said: "Margaret, how many times have I told you not to take such a thick skin?" Her voice was strident and at the breaking point. The girls turned flushed faces in her direction.

Nell reached the bedroom, latched the door, and threw herself down on the bed. Alice and Ellen clamored for admittance, but were unheeded. Nell lay quiet, her eyes unseeingly fixed on the wall with the broken plaster. In her calm she realized that in this as in all other things she must be reconciled to His indomitable will. Her spirit of fight was of no avail; she must accept fate. Her recent flash of anger went out like the lightning of a storm. She got up from her bed with a feeling akin to that experienced after the birth of her children

here in this room—she had been down in the valley for a while, but now she was up in the heights again.

She unlatched the door to Alice, who wore a wig of shavings and an apron of leaves.

"It's God's will."

Realizing that she had not given her family a pleasant greeting, she called to the girls in the kitchen: "Children, I see you got along fine without me. You must go over and see the new baby—cute little fellow, small and dark like Mrs. Max." Poor Sheila. He's her half brother and she doesn't even know it. She must be told some things! . . . but when?

Nell bathed her face, combed her hair, changed her wrapper, and rattled up some custard pies for the men's dinner.

CHAPTER XXXV

"HE'S a fine specimen of an Indian lad." Tim began, as he reported his conversation with Wild Goose. Nell, waiting in one of the stalls of the new barn for Tim's return from his visit to Johann's shanty, raised a haggard face. "I told him—as we planned—that we did not disapprove of him," Tim went on, "but that Sheila was very young: they should wait—say a year."

"And what did he say to that?" Nell asked. Nell had aged since morning; there was a droop in the corner of her eyes. She spoke hoarsely. "And what did he say to that?"

"He's proud. He drew himself up and told how his blood was of chiefs and our own white people. And how his grandmother worshipped our Great Spirit. How she had loved the Indians and had come back to die among them. 'So, too,' he said. 'Sheila would love them.' I like the fellow." Tim was pleased. "He seems upright enough. He's going away now, but he's coming back again next year when the grain is yellow. I told him that I would then tell him something that might please him."

Nell was in tears. "If she would only get kindness at his hands!"

"Don't worry about that, Nell. He seems honorable. He'll be kind."

"But his idea of kindness is not ours."

"Perhaps it will suit her." Tim, quite satisfied, drew out his pipe and joined a group of carpenters for a chat.

Nell, not convinced, decided to see the lad at once. So she met him in the field as he was approaching the house. "You'll be good to her?" she asked, raising a tear-stained face to the young Indian.

Wild Goose stood erect, folded his arms, and smiled. It was an indulgent smile. "Kind Woman," he said, "you have many children. You have much care. Sun-in-the-Hair will be safe with me."

Nell had no answer.

Nell and Tim soon shared the secret of Sheila's parentage with Ben.

Ben, sitting on Connors' doorstep as they confidentially told the story, drew a match across the sole of his boot, squinted faded blue eyes, lighted his pipe and tossed the smouldering match toward a tuft of grass. "I always expected that—the Indian strain. The red hair fooled me a little. Didn't expect she had more than a quarter; but I recognized it first time I set eyes on her. I'll look up this Wild Goose when I go West again. Might as well let her off with him."

But Nell was determined, despite all opposition, to send Sheila East to school for one year. "She'll meet people there," she argued, "and maybe forget all about this mysterious fellow."

"Would that be fair, for us to put her in the way of marrying a white man, he not knowing her race?" Tim questioned. "Whom will she marry, if not an Indian?"

"And the fellow has some White in him," Ben helped out.

"God made them and He matched them, is my way of thinking." And Tim puffed his pipe nervously.

Ben nodded in agreement, but Nell was unsatisfied.

"They were raised different. He's wild . . . the Lord only knows what he eats."

"He's had Christian training, and has property."

"And some schooling," Tim seconded. "And he's stood the test of honor better than herself."

Nell couldn't argue; neither could she be convinced. She could only try to resign herself, while a dull ache throbbed in her heart.

"Better not leave her out of our hands till we have him or some other responsible person to look after her."

"Tim, was there ever a man more aggravating? As though . . ." Nell could not finish. She moved away from the men.

Tim and Ben smoked on in silence.

Wild Goose stayed but a few days longer. He left as mysteriously as he came, and his name was seldom mentioned. Johann's shanty was moved near the group of buildings forming Casvales. The building which had first served the Hurds as a granary, later to be occupied by Johann and lastly by Wild Goose, was converted into a blacksmith and cobbling shop.

"Webber's going to be able to shoe anything from a buffalo to a grasshopper, but it's Lustfield who is going to put the skates on." Tim started the joke around.

The young Connors found many interests in this new shop. Horse-shoeing! Cobbling! Each day brought something novel. Wonderful things were coming to pass at their very door. The barn, having received its coat of shingles, now scintillated in the sun and sloped down conveniently from horse barn to cow shed, calf shed, pig shed. It was a tower! A palace! Ireland even could never boast of such. What a place to climb! And from

the calf shed Kitty Ann could touch the branches of a cottonwood. When the tree grew larger she would try to swing on its branches as Mom had swung on beeches! What a fascination in mangers, alley way, trap door, grain chute! All the children wished that they might live in the big, clean barn; but only Danny was allowed the privilege of sleeping there. Beside this imposing creation, the old black hatcher-of-a-house squatted and clucked unheeded.

The road was making progress. The advance guard—men with horses and scrapers—was already in sight, throwing up a black ridge in the level field. Followed the laying of ties at proper intervals, the setting of rails, the driving of spikes; and the engine hauling supplies and equipment moved nearer and nearer.

School claimed the children before the town was reached. Sheila, relieved that Nell would not send her off to school, gladly resumed her teaching; though apparently happy, she was quiet and more withdrawn from the Connors than before.

Danny was taking a man's place in the community—threshing, driving a team on the road, hauling lumber. Tim had many interests. "A jack of all trades and a master of none," he commented thereon. What with the threshing and the care of the stock, he had a lumber office; on one window was printed, *Lumber;* on the other, *Lawyer.*

Nell had only Alice at home with her now. Alice did not give much trouble; she contentedly built barns and stores of clean pine blocks. As Nell went about her work sometimes she limped a little to ease her more painful limb, but mostly she moved with a light, quick step.

The railroad coming to her door was symbolical to Nell. It was like the hand of God reaching out connecting them with the culture and civilization of the East. The railroad was making amends now! How cruelly it had deposited them at its terminus, years before, and had turned around and gone back East! She anticipated some satisfaction now in not viewing the train at all until it entered formally into the town.

As this celebration drew near, great were the preparations. The entire community was to view the train pulling into the town of Casvales. An immense bowery was laid; seats of planks were arranged, and a grandstand for speeches and for the band. Tim was asked to augment a Sioux City band with his flute.

Men worked all the night before; and when the first bars of pink shot from the eastern horizon, wagons loaded with men, women and children were arriving. By the time the sun peeped over Schwartzes' grove it viewed an unusual, variegated blot on the tramped stubble: flags, white pine, people, teams, wagons, the long ridge of black earth.

The Connor children were awake and out in the crowd without a thought of breakfast. The band had arrived!

Tim, flute in hand, hastened from the house and as quickly returned. "Come on, Nell," he called; "come out here now, where you can see the train. It's coming, Nell!"

Nell stood before him. "Tim," she said, "I don't want you to touch a drop of anything today. You shouldn't, Tim, if all the men in the world ask you. It

wouldn't be right. . . . And you know you can't stand anything."

"I won't," Tim answered solemnly, "if you come out close enough to see the train. Promise me this now—I must be off."

"I'll go out, Tim; but I'll stand here for the present, to get the first glimpse from our own doorway as I always said I would. I'll dress up and go out in the crowd later on; but I have a baking here to do, and Alice is in bed yet."

A cornet sounded. Tim hurried from the house.

Nell slid two long pans of bread into the oven.

A prolonged whistle sounded through the house. The old black hatcher stirred irritably as the reverberations jarred its feathers.

Nell put the lid on the stove, closed the drafts, took Alice in her arms, and went to the doorstep.

A train decorated with bunting was crawling like a gay caterpillar through Schwartzes' hayland. Now it was entering Connors' stubble! The band struck up *America*—it was entering the town!

Nell, carrying Alice, joined the crowd. Margaret found her and pulled her closer to the train. "See Danny, Mom?"

Glory be to God! There was Danny, wearing a trainman's cap and a bunting sash, in the engineer's box! His slim face was set, his chin firm. He looked neither to right nor left, but kept his eyes fixed on the track ahead and held firmly to the throttle of the engine.

People cheered and tossed hats into the air. There were hymns, too. While the children joined with the band in *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, old Germans moved

together and added: *Grosser Gott, wir loben Dich. . . .*"

Nell, holding tightly to the bewildered Alice, raised her apron to her eyes and cried with joy. There was Danny, driving a train into their land! . . . Their town! . . . The last time that she had seen a train. . . .

"We knew Danny all the time," her children shouted as they pressed against her. "What's the matter, Mom? Oh, Mom's crying."

"Children, the last time I saw a train it was leaving us, and I thought I'd die with the lonesome—"

"And now it's come to us," Margaret said happily, using Nell's own words.

"Come on, Mom." Kitty Ann was tugging at her arm.

"What is it, child?"

"Pop said for you to come. They want you in the picture."

As Nell moved with the children to be photographed, she thought: "I'll send one back East . . . but what will they think of my old wrapper, and Alice, poor child, in her nightgown!"

Once in the crowd she exchanged greetings with many; those with small children she invited to the house. The younger Breidbarths broke away from the hands of their elders and clung to her.

The first ceremony was the christening of the town. No preparation had been made for this ritual, as it had only now been suggested by Jim Long. Lustfield donated a bottle of wine. "Where's a pretty girl, now, for sponsor?" they asked.

"I'll find a girl," Nell volunteered.

With Van den Hulls she had noticed a Dutch girl in

native costume. Evidently just landed. A white cap partly covered the yellowest hair that she had ever seen. Her fair skin was tinted with color; she was alert, animated. Just the girl!

Jack Van den Hull acted as interpreter, telling the bewildered girl details of the ceremony which she had been chosen to enact.

She nodded as he explained. In her face was fear and timidity, yet there was the acquiescence found in the look of many immigrants. "I don't know what it all means, but I'm willing."

The girl religiously took the bottle, braced a wooden shoe against a railroad tie, leaned over, broke the bottle on a rail, and pronounced thickly: *Casvales*. While the shimmering golden fluid dried in the sun, the band played once more, and people shouted wildly.

Katto and others resented this honor shown the Dutch. "Dutch," Katto said bitterly. "You think, by Gutt, we got no Germans here. Dutch they got a town over farther. This is not their town."

Nell, knowing that Danny's place of prominence was no doubt included in her grievance, was nonplussed. "What harm, Katto, what harm?" she said. But later, when she heard that Katto's son, Pete, had caught the greasy pig, she was pleased. Things were evened up now. There must be no hard feelings on this great day.

There were other contests, and dancing, and excessive drinking. "Settin' 'em up" was the order of the day. Old prejudices and traditions were apparently forgotten. Strange, shy people smiled ingenuously at each other.

It was a motley crowd. No uniformity of dress. Hickory shirts and jeans. Green-black wedding suits. A few

swaggering young men in boughten clothes. Roadhands shaved for the occasion. Swarthy peddlers in sweaty coats. The speaker of the day, Jim Long, in a high hat and swallow-tailed coat—few recognized him. Silk dresses enlarged by bright new gores. Flashy calicoes. Immigrant women in shawls, full skirts, and light aprons. The Dutch in wooden shoes—little boys in full trousers fastened to the waist with large white buttons. Nell Connor in a faded wrapper. Alice in a nightgown.

Nell, while greeting distinguished guests from the county seat, thought of her bread in the oven. Excusing herself, she picked up Alice and hurried to the house. The crust of the bread was burned black, but that could be scraped off. The fire was out. Lord save us, it was eleven o'clock and not a sign of dinner, or a tap of work done! The children had eaten no breakfast. Chiding herself, she re-kindled the fire and put a cake into the oven. She dressed Alice and made up the beds. None too soon. The women were arriving with their babies.

At noon clans became conspicuous as people gathered in their respective groups to eat. When the Connor children came trooping in, all talking at once, Nell hushed them. The beds were filled with babies! Luxemberger slept peacefully beside High German. German beside Dutch. Max's son occupied Alice's cradle.

Kitty Ann complained: "We can't even talk, and other people are having picnics with chicken 'n' everything."

Nell felt a little guilty. "We'll have our chicken and our picnic some other day to make up for this," she told them. "Eat up your bread and milk now, and I have a cake for you, cooling."

They were surprised to see Tim coming—Tim and Danny had been invited by the railroad officials to eat at the hotel.

"I gave me place to young Peck down from the county seat. He had no place to eat," Tim explained. "Danny is enough to represent the family."

"Come here, Tim," Nell called him into the bedroom where the children were sleeping. There was something prophetic in the rows of soft babies, their hands outstretched over their heads, their satiny skins, their plump curved legs, their chunky bodies. "The railroad and the town are not for me nor for you, Tim, but for them, them and for ours outside."

Tim drew closer. "Look at their fists doubled up ready for each other! Them Hollander babies are the color of skimmed milk. Max's son is the brunette of the crowd. Please God, may they never know what it is to be cut off from a railroad."

"And civilization," Nell added.

"Here's a bottle of wine Lustfield sent to the women folks," Tim said, unearthing a flask. "Give 'em some if they want it; the men are getting more than their share."

After dinner women coming to reclaim their children stayed on in the shade of the house. The sun shone intensely on the stubble and town. Children sought out the grove. One woman whom Nell had not noticed before sank weakly onto the doorstep. Her baby was very young.

"How old?" Nell asked.

"Two weeks," she replied, smiling with colorless lips.

"Two weeks!" Nell repeated. "Here, lie right down on this lounge and I'll give you a little wine. Stop right

here till your husband comes after you." Nell still wore the wrapper of the morning.

By mid-afternoon, resolutions of peace and good fellowship were numbed by beer. Quarreling began. The music ceased. The band left. There was only the clamor of voices: threats, epithets.

"Oh, Mom! Breidbarth is fighting someone and his children are crying," the young Connors reported.

Nell went over to the bowery, where Emil, the eldest Breidbarth boy, and Lizzie Abel were sitting. "Emil," Nell called, "come now and get your father and load up the children and start for home."

Emil loved to dance with Lizzie, yet he was fond of Nell Connor. He lowered his big, blonde head, but raised his clear, gray eyes. "I want for to dance once more the schottish."

"You better not wait, Emil. Go along with him, Lizzie," Nell added, as Emil obeyed reluctantly.

Nell returned to her house to meet the father of the very young infant. He was a shy, husky man; and Nell was pleased to see that he had not drunk too much. They left for home, the young mother holding the babe perched upon the high wagon seat.

As the sun lowered, women hitched the teams, lifted tired children into the wagons, coaxed their men from the bar, and helped them to wagon seats; then picking up the reins they drove home, the rumbling of their wagons echoing to each other across the level land.

On the long ridge of black earth, two rails glistening like lines of fire pointed first to the east and then to the setting sun. A small train engine in tattered bunting shrieked a prolonged Godspeed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SPRING came again to the prairie, but the hues and tints of its illimitable green were defined by sharp corners—barbed wire had made a checker board of the country. It was settlers now who determined where should be a square of bluish-green oats, or a rectangle of greenish-blue hayland. Along the railroad track lush grass and flowers, after their recent upheaval, again found footing in the moist "dump"; but the pebbly ridge defied vegetation and traced a white scar across the green. In Casvales, heavy boots and calloused heels ground paths to store, to depot, to Connors' yard.

The sight of growing grain was to Nell a constant reminder that there would be a day soon when that harvest would be yellow, and Sheila would perhaps be carried away. Although she said nothing of this, she had a feeling that each day brought her nearer to the death of something dear. She went on with her work. Yes, she was grateful to God for their prosperity. She cooked, she baked, she sewed, she spoke to the children: "Margaret, hear Kitty Ann with her Catechism. Alice, child, don't suck that thumb." *Sheila is an Indian and must, I suppose, marry one! The coldest place in the tent! The heaviest burden!* "Emmet, get me a basket of shavings. That's the man." *Perhaps Wild Goose won't return! Would Sheila forget him? Should she tell Sheila her parentage now? When must neighbors be told?* "Ellen, bring me in a few fresh eggs." *Wild Goose will return! I feel it!*

Under the same roof Sheila, equally reticent of her true feelings, also watched the grain. With its harvest would come deliverance—Life with its fulfillment. During the languid spring days as she listlessly heard her pupils locate the Tropic of Cancer, and parse nouns, through the open door came the call of meadow lark to meadow lark, bobolink to bobolink: she dreamed idly of her lover. Mom was so foolish to worry. Mom could not understand. Why, she and Wild Goose had belonged to each other always, long before the prairie grass was made. Wild Goose did not know what he was. She did not know who she was. Although she received no letters from him as Katie Steindler did from Pete Schwartz, who had gone on with the road, she needed no periodic assurances of loyalty. Each evening as she walked home to Connors', the prairie grass swished: "Sun-in-the-Hair. You are waiting."

After the grain turned from grass to stalk, Sheila went daily to the field, tenderly held a stalk across her palm, and speculated as to when it would head . . . fill out . . . turn yellow!

While the older Connors were enacting this silent drama, the young ones, lately freed from school, daily watched the trains, the neighbors hauling lumber, the unfurling of a tender yellow bloom on the cactus, the erection of the little church, and the new house.

Early summer saw the framework of Connors' new house hoist itself over the trees as a rival to the pretentious barn. Nell had visualized this house for many years—a replica of Judge De Wayne's in Springfield. In the drafting of plans, however, the eastern gables were forced to compromise with the plain ells of the

prairie; and, in consequence, the Connors had a spacious ten-room house whose front was assuming more each day the expression of a face, the bay window serving as mouth.

Nell spoke much of Sheila's room.

"Why plan so on Sheila's room?" Tim questioned. "Maybe we won't have Sheila after we have the house."

But Nell continued to plan on Sheila's room. She wished to convince herself that Sheila's going off was in the future, if at all.

Ben appeared one evening, and his casual relating of momentous news brought Nell face to face with the present; and she realized that in this as in all other things she must try to reconcile herself to the will of God. Sheila would be going! Ben had visited Wild Goose in his home where he was living alone since his father's death. He was coming, as he had said, when his harvest was cut and shocked.

The well-digger had made other inquiries on his trip and had learned the meaning of Sheila's name. "*Shayla vin,*" he said, "means *reddish girl.* That's all anyone could make out of it."

Tears of pity rushed to Nell's eyes, tears of compassion for Sheila's deserted young Indian mother, who had nothing by which to place a name upon her child other than the coloring of its hair.

"And you should have nothing against Wild Goose," Ben continued. "Some half-breeds have the best of both races in 'em. And others again—"

"Are not so blessed," Tim finished for him.

As the young Connors gathered around the doorstep, Ben related other bits of news. He had given up rail-

roading, he told them, and was going to settle in Casvales and help run the lumber yard. "I'm tired of roving," he made excuse as he put an arm around Robert Emmet, who was snuggling close. Ben was tired, and he looked very old. His body had shriveled since he dug Connors' well, and his fringe of hair was white and sparse. "I'll help your Poppy here make a little money to school this young army. And Allen is moving his family from Buffalo to Sioux City. The West has won him. His boy, Edgar, is going to attend the new academy at Upham. Now that school would be a fine place for Danny. He could come home every few weeks."

Nell could not assent: she could say nothing. Her heart was too full. She was grateful to Ben the well-digger, but she could hear no more just now. She arose and walked away. As she entered the grove, the big white house with its rectangular eves glared at her accusingly. Ingratitude? Here all about her were evidences of the realization of hopes. How dare she, Nell Connor, dread the yellowing harvest, a bountiful harvest! No, she would rise to meet that harvest as she had risen to greet each day and what it held for her, all these years.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IT was four weeks later, and Sheila was moving out of sight of the Connors, away from their town, the big barn, the new house. Wild Goose and his spirited team were carrying her farther and farther away. At the back of the covered wagon Bluey was tied, followed by her two heifers. Nell could still see them from the doorstep.

Sheila and Wild Goose had made an impressive picture that morning as they stood before Father Leurmann in the unfinished church. Indeed, even Katto and Max's wife could not refrain from commenting on their beauty. Wild Goose, erect, in velvet trousers and scarlet shirt; Sheila, demure as usual, her hair in two long braids bound by a band of beads—the gift of Wild Goose. They were a beautiful pair. Now they were gone.

Nell's own children broke from the line which they had formed in watching the disappearing wagon, and were climbing to points of vantage on the barn.

"She's waving, Mom," they shouted.

Nell snatched the white cloth from the table, ran outside the grove, and swung it high over her head. She saw Sheila waving from the rear of the covered wagon, its gray shirring forming a broad halo around her head.

Nell sank down wearily on the doorstep. Alice stood before her, inserted her thumb in her mouth, and buried her face in the spacious lap.

Danny, on the apex of the barn, called out: "Goodbye, Sheila."

Margaret from her station on the cow shed, Kitty Ann from the calf shed, Robert Emmet from the hog shed, and Ellen, swinging from a board which carried rainwater from the series of sheds to a barrel, echoed in turn: "Good-bye, good-bye . . ."

The wagon was lost to Nell's view. Her eyes were filled with tears. Unheeded they rolled down her face. With the knowledge of a great void in her heart came the thought: she had failed in her guidance of Sheila. Else why should Sheila, a lovely young girl, leave comforts and go off to the unknown with a strange man? Well, if she had failed she knew that she had done her best. And Tim saw only satisfaction in Sheila's decision. But Tim couldn't understand. . . . Where was Tim? He should be in the field! And Danny and the others should get down from that barn! There was so much to be done. . . .

She looked at Danny, but his sphinx-like attitude arrested her call. Oblivious to the chatter of his brother and sisters, he was standing silently facing the east. Nell recalled his often repeated aspiration: "Edgar can work the land. When I'm a man I'm going East and study how to relieve pain and how to cure women like Mrs. Breidbarth. . . ."

Nell stood up and raised Alice to her arms. Her pulse quickened. She wiped at her tears with the back of her hand. As the circulation stirred in her swollen ankles, she winced with pain. Only for an instant. She squared her shoulders.

From Danny she looked at the others. They, too, had fine, erect bodies and alert minds. Thank God, they now had enough to eat.

Their future, however, would be more than a struggle for bread. It would be a series of achievements and heartaches in the realization of individual ambitions. If she could only place her body between them and life! . . .

She saw her children like sturdy stalks of corn, well rooted in black soil, each carrying a golden tassel, going on and on and . . . disappearing off there at the horizon.

Stretched before her, too, was her own future: days upon days of loving service. Anxious moments. Comforting moments. And if she failed! . . . Well, she would have done her best.

But God is good. Danny will be going to the academy at Upham this fall. He must have a suit of boughten clothes. And Margaret . . . perhaps the railroad will be built clear to Upham before Margaret starts.

There were footsteps. Tim was standing at her side. With a swoop he took the sleeping Alice in his arms. Relieved, Nell shifted her weight and leaned against his shoulder.

A train was crawling through their field. It stopped near the cluster of small buildings, unloaded some white lumber and moved on to the west.

It was cool on the doorstep. Shade from the tall cottonwoods filled the yard. Flowerbeds bordered with whitewashed stones. The white fence. The barn. A new house. And on a pedestal—the cactus which bloomed only once every hundred years, showing a delicate yellow blossom.

Nell was conscious of music—not clearly defined. But a harmonious rhythm: creaking cottonwood leaves,

Alice's even breathing, Tim's crooning lullaby, bare feet descending shingled roofs. . . .

The Connor children of various heights pressed around their parents. But Tim and Nell stayed on the doorstep of the old house and watched the summer sunshine flood their stubble with a maze of golden light.

THE END

BLACK SOIL

By

JOSEPHINE DONOVAN

(Continued from Front Flap)

The children in *Black Soil* prove that loveliness is not necessarily begot of luxury. These young people grow up influenced by the beauty and mystery of life about them. They look for romance and romance finds them here.

There are humor and pathos in *Black Soil.* It is the story that your father or your grandfather relates when in a reminiscent mood . . . "They came from different parts of the world. Settled there together. And so the Mid-West was made."

The author was born and spent her childhood in northwestern Iowa, arriving too late to witness the coming of the railroad, but early enough to see native prairie used as hayland. She spent four years at the State University of Iowa, where she received the degree A. B. While she has been writing for years, most of her literary work has been along historical lines. *Black Soil* is her first novel.

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